WAR WALK: TOURING THE WATERLOO BATTLEFIELD

BRITAIN'S BEST-SELLING MILITARY MONTHLY

BRITAIN AT WAR

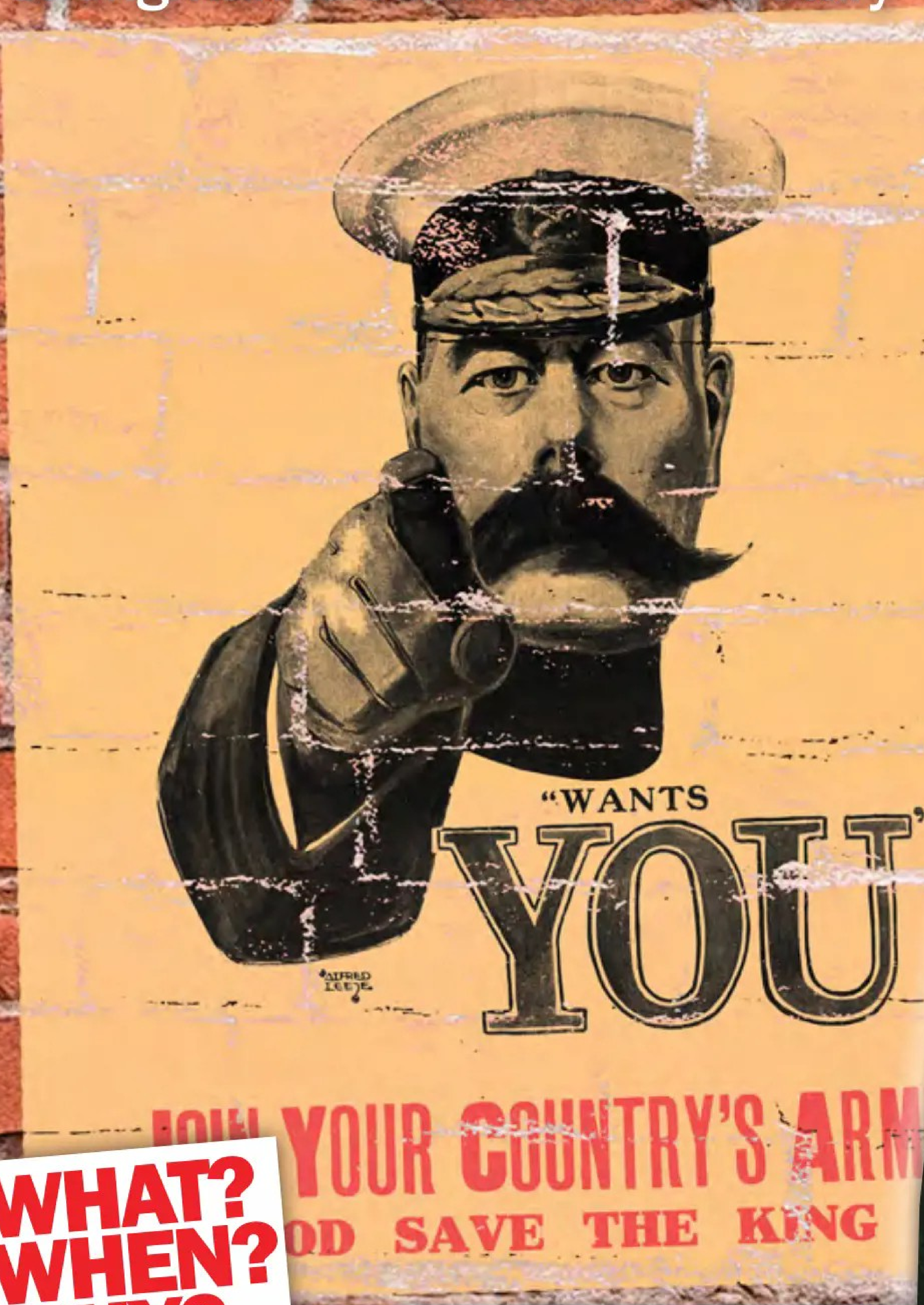
ISSUE 218

MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION

Is Britain's Boxer IFV fit for the future?

THE MAN BEHIND THE POSTER

Lord Kitchener of Khartoum's rise from imperial strongman to cabinet war secretary



June 2025
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WHAT? WHEN? WHY?

THE ALLIED INVASION OF IRAN

German giant

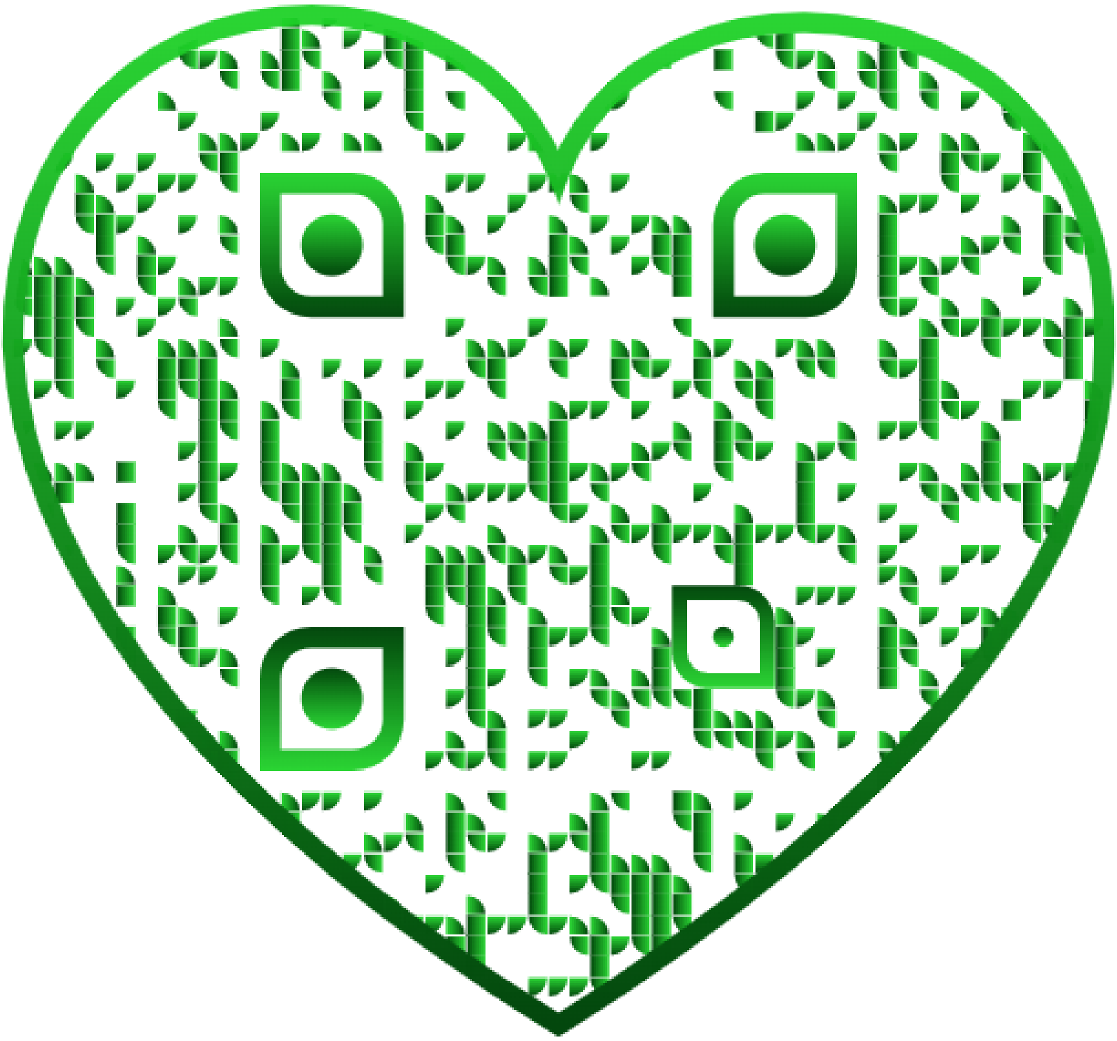
What did Britain make of Adler's super-heavy E-100 tank?

Winged wonders

The British aviation craze and the early pioneers of the Royal Flying Corps

Miracle shot

Did Brit sharpshooter scupper a German airborne raid?



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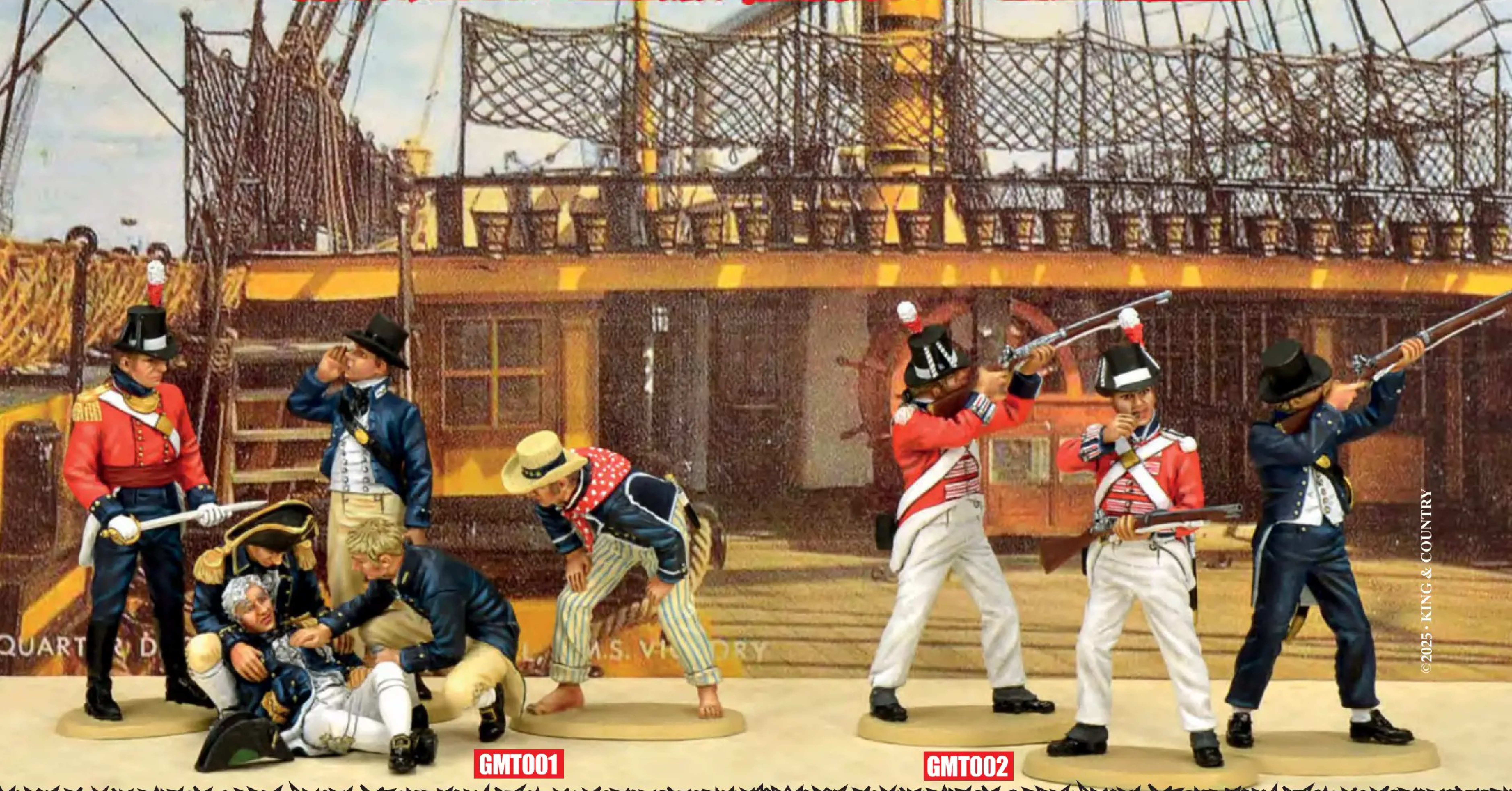
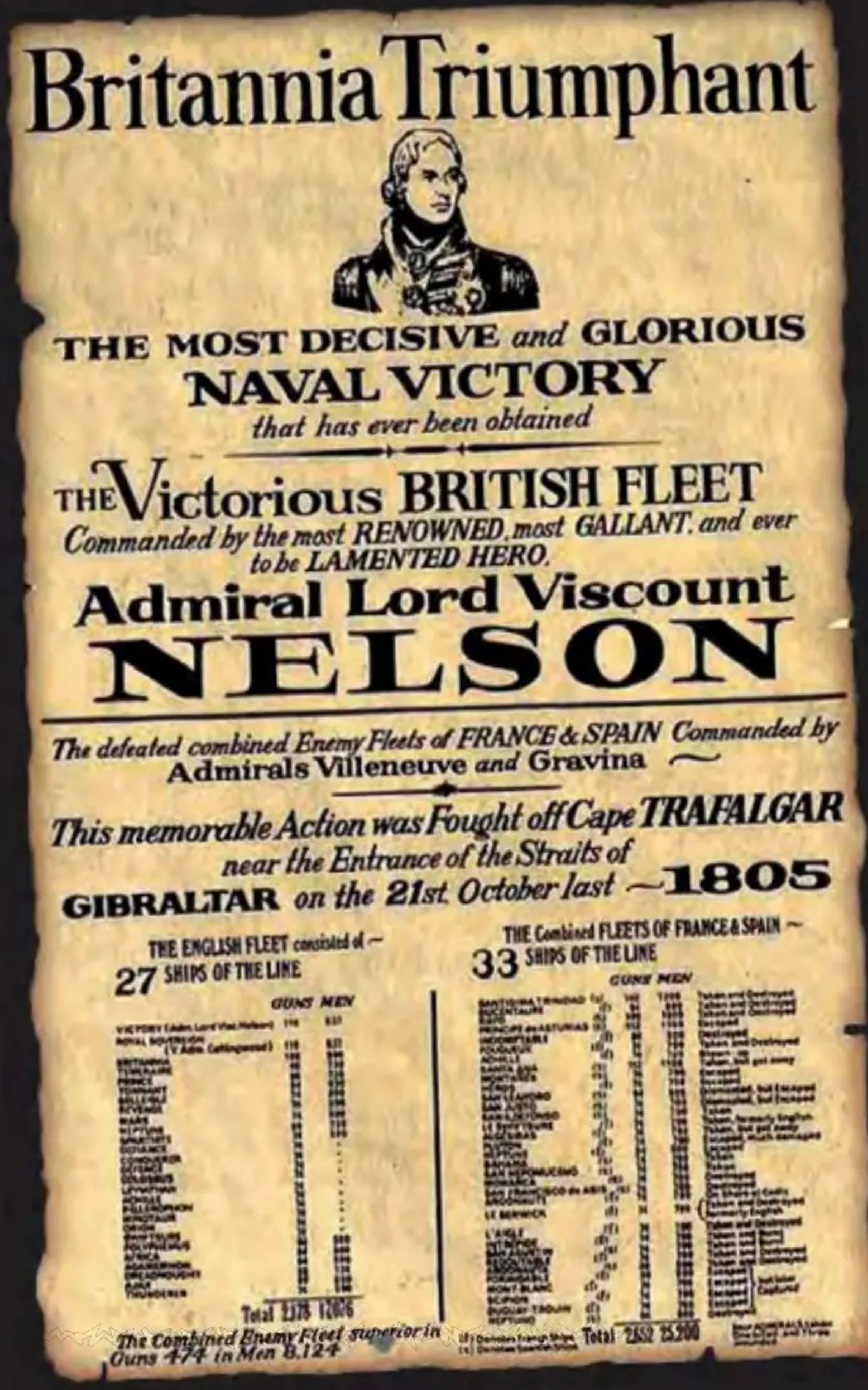


The Death of Nelson

THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR was the greatest sea battle of the 19th Century and took place on 21 October 1805 off the south-western coast of Spain.



Britannia Triumphant

THE MOST DECISIVE *and* GLORIOUS
NAVAL VICTORY
that has ever been obtained

THE Victorious BRITISH FLEET
Commanded by the most RENOWNED, most GALLANT, and ever to be LAMENTED HERO.
Admiral Lord Viscount
NELSON

The defeated combined Enemy Fleets of FRANCE & SPAIN Commanded by
Admirals Villeneuve *and* Gravina ~

This memorable Action was Fought off Cape TRAFALGAR near the Entrance of the Straits of GIBRALTAR *on the 21st October last* ~1805

THE ENGLISH FLEET consisted of ~
27 SHIPS OF THE LINE

THE Combined FLEETS OF FRANCE & SPAIN ~
33 SHIPS OF THE LINE

The Combined Enemy Fleet superior in Guns 474 in Men 8,124

This mighty naval action was fought between Britain's Royal Navy and the combined fleets of Napoleonic France and Royalist Spain.

In command of the British fleet was *Vice Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson*, whose leadership and tactics won for Britain a series of decisive naval victories and made him a national hero.

Nelson was also exceptionally brave and throughout his naval career would be wherever the danger was fiercest and his leadership most required and visible to friend and foe alike.

At Trafalgar, *Nelson* was on board his flagship, *'H.M.S. VICTORY'* alongside its commander, *Capt. Thomas Hardy* pacing across the *Quarterdeck* issuing orders and directing the battle.

Meanwhile sharpshooters from nearby enemy warships fired onto *'Victory's'* deck from high in their rigging and masts.

THE MORTAL WOUND

At 1:15 in the afternoon of the battle *Capt. Hardy* saw *Lord Nelson* fall onto the deck and rushed to his side. The Admiral had been struck by a musket ball fired from the mizzen-top of a French ship-of-the-line, locked alongside *'Victory'*.

GMT001 *'THE DEATH OF NELSON'*

This unique *6 Figure Set* captures that moment in time with *Nelson* fatally wounded and supported by his friend *Capt. Hardy* and a *Ship's Surgeon.*

Joining them is a protective *Royal Marine* officer and a young *Midshipman* calling for assistance and a *Sailor* leaning over to help.

This special set also comes with a complimentary *'vintage'* full-colour, printed backdrop of the *Quarterdeck* area on *'Victory'* where Nelson fell.

GMT002 *'Shooting The Sharpshooter'*

Many sources report that the person who shot the French marksman who shot Nelson was *Midshipman John Pollard* ably supported by a pair of *Royal Marines.*

To find out more about any of these historic Royal Navy 1:30 scale, all-metal, hand-painted figures simply contact our website at: *www.kingandcountry.com*

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From the Editor

BAW's **John Ash and Max Weemans of Visit Wallonia approach Hougoumont's south gate** ANDREW STONE

I think I've unintentionally created a big theme for this issue – and I mean literally BIG, with articles on one of the biggest battles of the Napoleonic Wars, a new British Army vehicle larger than some tanks, a huge German armoured behemoth, a moment of high drama during the 1941 invasion of Greece and a major force of personality in Field Marshal the Earl Kitchener.

Kitchener was an imperial strongman and Britain's colonial troubleshooter, with a reputation for both ruthlessness and conciliation. Yet what is most strongly associated with him? That iconic poster.

So ubiquitous is the 'Kitchener Wants You' family of posters that they and their derivatives are still used for marketing. Indeed, one of the first things I saw when leaving Brussels-Midi station a few weeks ago was an 'Uncle Sam' variation of the poster advertising Coca-Cola – I kid you not. To reinforce the point, here's a list I came across recently ranking the most recognised faces in history: Jesus Christ is at number one, then Adolf Hitler, Albert Einstein, Marilyn Monroe, Mahatma Gandhi, Queen Elizabeth II and so on through a plethora of well-known individuals. Where is Kitchener? Would you believe it, at number 14. That puts him just beneath Winston Churchill, John F Kennedy and Josef Stalin, but more recognisable than Elvis Presley, Martin Luther King Jr and Barack Obama.

Deep down, I think we all know there was more to Kitchener than his moustachioed likeness, so Dr Graham Goodlad delves into his life and times to mark what would have been his 175th birthday, revealing a fascinating, ambition-driven career that was certainly not short of controversy.

If you like to measure history in big, dramatic moments, then Platon Alexiades and Ross Robertson have the feature for you. In April 1941, Germany launched an airborne operation against the sole crossing spanning the critical Corinth Canal, but two British officers had an alternative ambition. Discover how their steadfast precision with a Lee Enfield put a thorn in Germany's paw.

How about something on a unique German super-heavy tank prototype? Everything about the E-100 was outsized but, as Craig Moore shows, when it comes to tanks, big does not always mean better. In 1945, the British found themselves in possession of the sole example of this unfinished behemoth and were able to piece together quite a history behind the tank's design, confirming that it was nothing but a white elephant. Find out why in Craig's informative piece.

Meanwhile, I step into the ring with the Boxer, Britain's new armoured vehicle, which is expected to enter service this year. This rather impressive vehicle promises much and might well deliver it. I run over the Boxer's 32-year on again/off again relationship with the British Army and speak to a manufacturer's representative to learn why it is fit for the future.

If you enjoyed the harrowing but often guilt-tinged humorous insights into the Western Front offered by our *Laugh or cry* series, then prepare for more with Peter Hart's and Gary Bain's new series, *Laugh or fly*. This gives the same treatment to the experiences of the RFC, the precursor to the RAF, with part one taking off as the newfangled craze that is powered aviation begins to influence those in military circles.

Now, this month's pièce de resistance. *Classic Military Vehicle* editor Andrew Stone and I recently spent time in Belgium courtesy of Visit Wallonia, where things became "dangerously cultural", as a veteran university lecturer (who will remain unnamed, but University of Kent graduates will know) would often exclaim in our seminars. One of the reasons we were there was to follow in the Duke of Wellington's footsteps and trace the progress of his Anglo-Allied army north through modern-day Belgium. We discovered a spectacular array of museums and sites. Join us on our tour, as we reveal some of the things we learned and put the spotlight on some wonderful Belgian appreciation of our shared history.

John Ash, Editor

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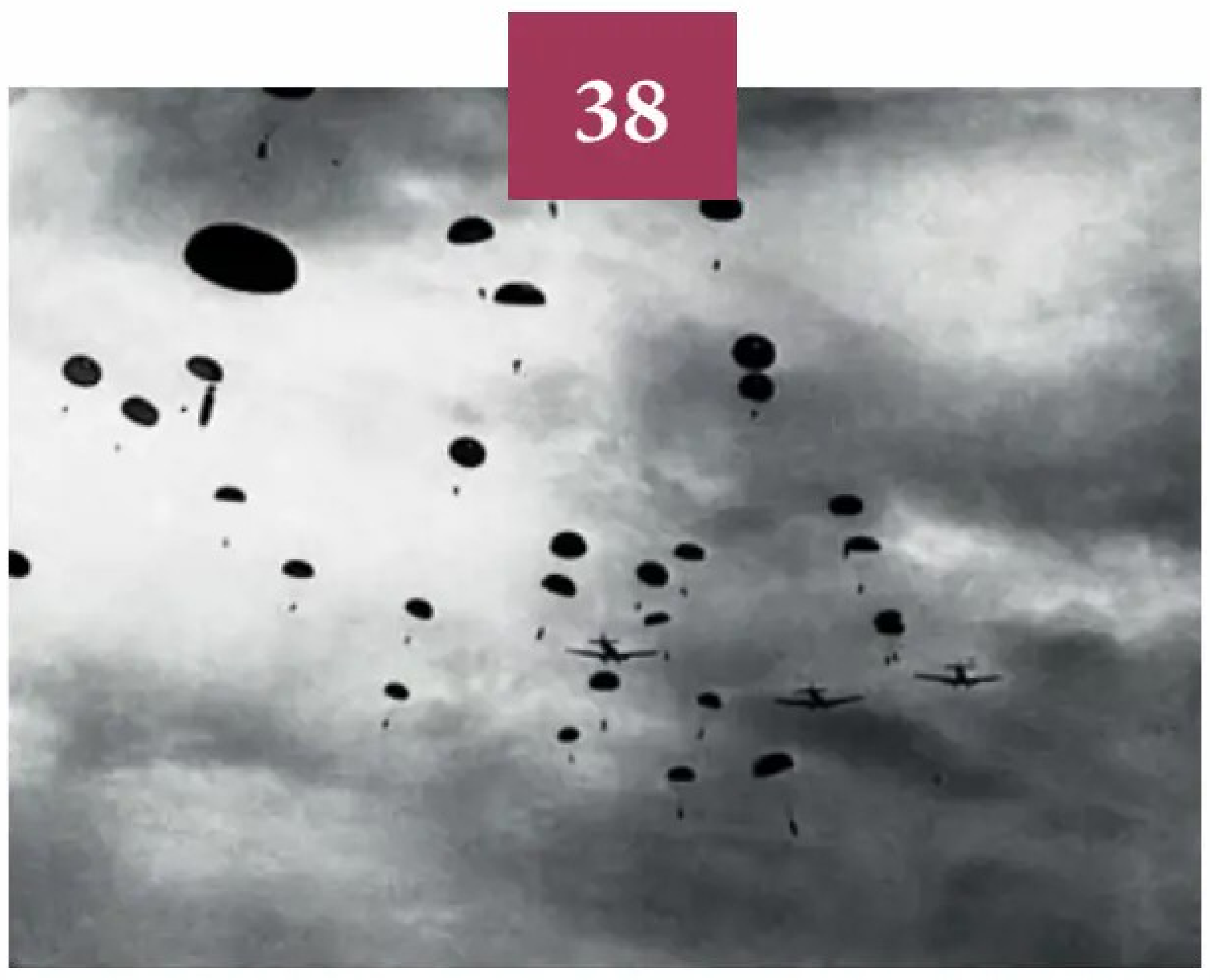

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His moustachioed likeness inspired millions to enlist in World War One, but who was the man behind the poster? Dr Graham Goodlad explores the rise of Field Marshal the Earl Kitchener, Britain's imperial troubleshooter

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Miracle shot

MAIN IMAGE: Alamy Art Collection
DESIGN: Steve Diggle

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Big Ben's Ayrton Light lights up for wartime anniversary

The Ayrton Light illuminating the space above the iconic clockface COLIN/COMMONS

On April 24, House of Commons Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle switched on Parliament's historic Ayrton Light, recreating the symbolic act of his predecessor 80 years ago.

The light, which tops Big Ben's tower – officially the Elizabeth Tower since 2012 – was switched off in 1939 to comply with blackout regulations. However, in 1945, Colonel Douglas Clifton Brown, Speaker from 1943 to 1951, interrupted a debate to announce he would turn the Ayrton Light back on.

Brown used a switch beside the Speaker's chair to turn on the light, telling the House: "In peacetime, the lantern light above Big Ben always shone out after sunset in order to show that the House of Commons was at work. For five years, seven months and 23 days, this light has been extinguished. When I press this switch, our lantern light will shine once more. In doing so, I pray that, with God's blessing, this light will shine henceforth not only as an outward and visible sign that the Parliament of a free people is assembled in free debate, but also that it may shine as a beacon of sure hope in a sadly torn and distracted world."

Sir Lindsay was joined at the top of the Elizabeth Tower by two Chelsea Pensioners: John Morris, 103, who served in the Royal Artillery and is the last surviving member of the Raiding Support Regiment, and Tony Hunt, 85, who remembers VE Day in 1945 as a child.

Hoyle said, "It was an incredible privilege to recreate such a symbolic moment in our history, with two veterans who remember what it was like to realise that peace was returning after six long years at war. Turning on the Ayrton Light was important to Speaker Clifton Brown, because it showed that our democracy had survived the war, and it is something we have held dear ever since".

Speaker of the House of Commons Sir Lindsay Hoyle with Chelsea Pensioner Tony Hunt after turning on the Ayrton Light ALAMY

Submariner whose actions diverted disaster dies

Commander Timothy Kelsey Cannon, QGM, CEng, MIMarE, who helped extinguish a fire aboard the nuclear-powered submarine HMS *Warspite*, has died aged 81.

On May 2, 1976, while *Warspite* – Britain's third nuclear submarine – was berthed at Merseyside, a diesel generator burst into flames and, within minutes, the submarine's rear compartments had filled with "vicious, choking, black toxic smoke."

Although *Warspite's* nuclear reactor was shut down, it still required cooling with pumps, and those aboard did not know whether the vessel's emergency cooling system had kicked in. *Warspite's* commander, Terry Woods, even considered scuttling the vessel, but such a measure proved unnecessary in part due to the actions of Tim Cannon, the boat's senior engineering officer, who reached the scene 40 minutes after the blaze broke out, along with civilian firefighters.

Cannon's first action was to rescue four watchkeepers trapped in a compartment 30ft from the inferno. Lacking self-contained breathing apparatus, Cannon reached them by plugging his oxygen mask into fixed breathing sockets along the vessel's interior, gulping in air each time, and holding his breath as he felt his way forward to the next socket. He reached the watchkeepers and, finding one man had collapsed, dragged the submariner back to safety before supervising the evacuation of remaining trio.

Royal Navy commander Tim Cannon MALCOLM CANNON

For the next three hours, Cannon directed the firefighting effort. After two fire brigade teams failed to reach the seat of the fire, he decided to fill the compartment with foam. By now equipped with proper breathing equipment, Cannon braved the intense heat to ensure the compartment was filled. He then returned to refill it a second time. In all, it took four hours to extinguish the fire and, for their efforts, Cannon and two of *Warspite's* ratings were awarded the Queen's Gallantry Medal.

Cannon served in the Royal Navy Submarine Service for a further 14 years, was promoted to commander in 1981, and retired in 1993 after 32 years of service

He died on March 20, and is survived by his two children.

Chelsea Pensioner completes London Marathon

On April 27, 2025, Chelsea Pensioner Dave Godwin and Royal Hospital Chelsea CEO David Richmond MBE participated in the famous London Marathon to raise funds for the Royal Hospital Chelsea and the Invictus Games Foundation.

Godwin, 73, served in the Royal Military Police for 25 years and retired as a company sergeant major. Always an avid runner, he first took part in the London Marathon in 1982. After a year of training and daily runs, the Chelsea Pensioner decided to support the hospital by taking on the 26.2-mile course in 2025, but this time, in specially designed scarlets – the iconic uniform worn by Chelsea Pensioners when representing the Royal Hospital on an organised visit or on parade.

He was joined by Richmond, who said: "The Royal Hospital Chelsea provides care, support, comradeship and recognition to those who served at home and abroad. Many of these men and women continue to serve by volunteering in homeless shelters, food banks, at schools and elsewhere every week. The hospital relies on donations from the generous public to do its work and to honour the service of these old soldiers. As CEO, I thank you for your support".

CEO David Richmond (L) and Chelsea Pensioner Dave Godwin ROYAL HOSPITAL CHELSEA

Veteran sailor passes out of BRNC Dartmouth after 63 years

An 81-year-old former Royal Navy officer has passed out of Britannia Royal Naval College six decades after he first began training there.

Captain (Ret'd) Malcolm Farrow OBE joined BRNC Dartmouth in September 1962, but it is an administrative fumble rather than 60 years of retaken courses that meant he never formally passed out. This was due to his transfer to the Royal Naval Engineering College in nearby Plymouth to start a degree course, before he decided to become an officer and specialise in communication and electronic warfare.

Captain Farrow on the occasion of his passing out parade ALICE FARROW

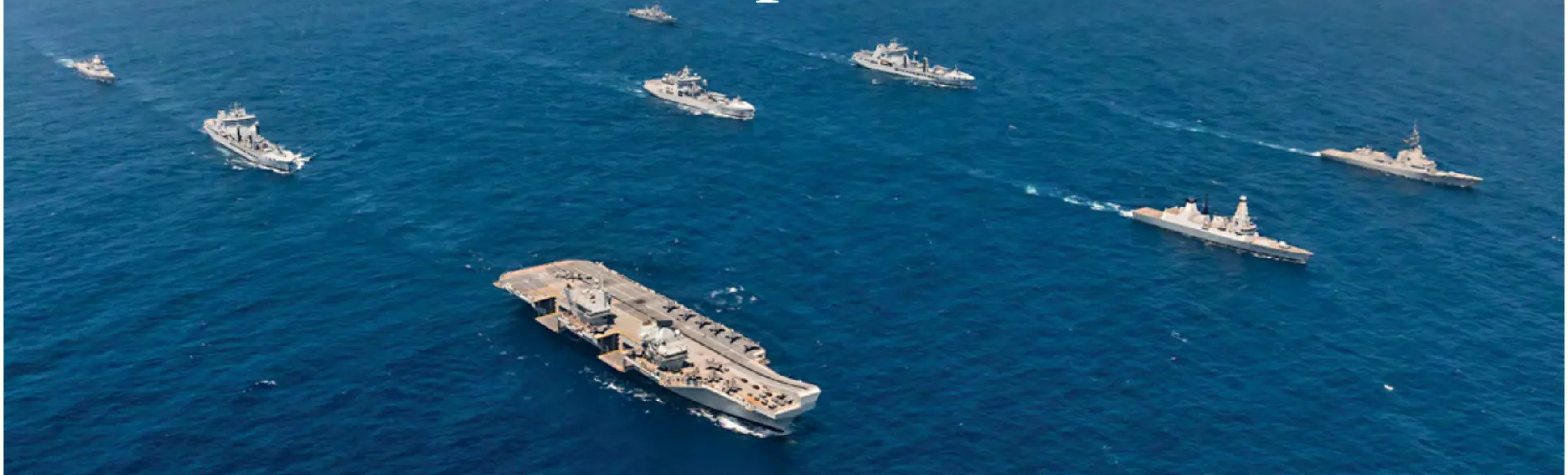
Farrow enjoyed a 39-year naval career that included a stint serving as a lieutenant-commander on Rear-Admiral Sandy Woodward's staff during the 1982 Falklands Conflict. After retiring in 1996 as a commander, he rejoined in 1999 at the rank of captain to become director of the International Festival of the Sea in 2001 and received an OBE from the then Prince Charles.

After overseeing a national service commemorating the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar in 2005, Farrow became president of the Flag Institute, an adviser to the all-party parliamentary group on British heritage, and a trustee of the Association of Service Drop-in Centres. It was only after Farrow's daughter Alice revealed that her godson, Midshipman Charles Murphy – the grandson of one of Farrow's closest friends, Charles Roe – was attending Dartmouth, that he finally revealed he had never passed out. Alice then secretly corresponded with the college and arranged for her father to complete the ceremony.

On April 16, 63 years after first beginning his training, Farrow returned to Dartmouth to complete his long overdue passing-out parade. He was joined by his best friend's grandson, Midshipman Murphy, for the final steps of the ceremony, representing three generations of service and enduring friendship.

Captain Farrow said: "To be invited back to the parade ground at BRNC after 63 years was a huge honour and privilege – and a lot of fun."

UK Carrier Strike Group heads for Indo-Pacific


HMS *Prince of Wales* led the multi-national UK Carrier Strike Group 2025 into the Mediterranean on Operation Highmast. The eight-month deployment, which includes vessels from 13 navies, is to take part in Exercise Neptune Strike in the Med before transiting to Australia for Exercise Talisman Sabre and then moving into the Pacific. The carrier hosts 18 F-35B Lightning strike aircraft from 617 Squadron and 809 Naval Air Squadron, and, according to the *UK Defence Journal*, will carry the largest fifth-generation carrier air wing ever assembled when six more F-35s join her. Shown from front to back: row one (l to r): *Prince of Wales, Dauntless, Méndez Núñez;* row two: *Tideforce, Maud, Tidespring;* row three: *Roald Amundsen, Richmond* PO PHOT JAMES CLARKE/MOD

Halifax explosion hero honoured with plaque

Petty Officer Richard Jones outside the former home of Halifax blast survivor Able Seaman William Becker ROYAL NAVY

A memorial plaque has been unveiled at the former home of a Royal Navy sailor who survived one of the largest non-atomic explosions in history.

Able Seaman William Becker was aboard HMS *Highflyer* on the morning of December 6, 1917, when disaster struck the busy Halifax Harbour in Nova Scotia. The French merchant vessel SS *Mont Blanc*, laden with 2,500 tonnes of high explosive, collided with SS *Imo*, a Norwegian steamship charted by the Commission for Relief. Shortly after, damaged benzol barrels stored on deck began to leak vapour, which was ignited by sparks, starting a fire that quickly grew out of control.

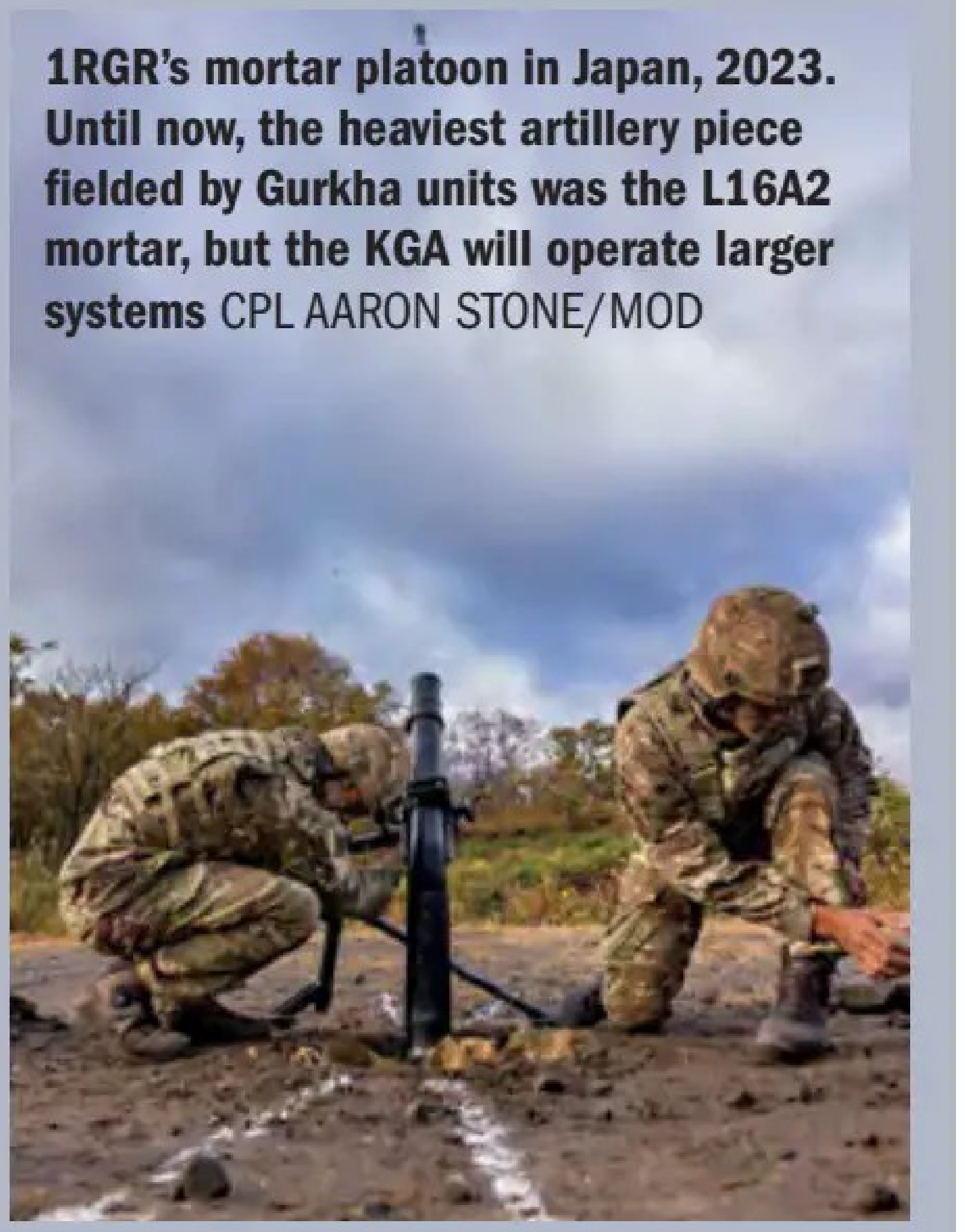
As *Mont Blanc's* crew abandoned ship, several of *Highflyer's* men rowed across the harbour to tackle the blaze. As the sailors made their way to the vessel, the flames reached the hold and a three-kilotonne blast – equivalent to one-fifth the power of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima – disintegrated the vessel. Nearly all of structures within a half-mile radius were destroyed as a superheated pressure wave moved at three times the speed of sound, flattening factories, wharves and streets. A 66ft-high tsunami also swept the port, lifting the 5,000grt *Imo* and several other vessels and dumping them on the shore. At least 1,782 people were killed, with some 9,000 injured.

Six of *Highflyer's* crew were killed in the blast but, somehow, Becker – one of the rescue crew that had rowed across – survived and managed to swim ashore through the icy waters. For his bravery, Becker was awarded the Albert Medal, equivalent to today's George Medal.

Becker formerly lived at 40 Trinity Road in Bridlington. In April 2025, a blue plaque was dedicated to him thanks to the efforts of Petty Officer Richard Jones, a Royal Navy historian who has made it his life mission to ensure local heroes are remembered. The senior rate, who has served in the aircraft carrier HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, told *BAW*: "It is great that William Becker's life and efforts are now remembered. Without the support of Bridlington residents and veterans, this plaque would never have happened."

New Gurkha unit announced in Army first

A new regiment, The King's Gurkha Artillery (KGA), is to be formed at Larkhill, Wiltshire, with some 400 Gurkha personnel recruited or transferred to fill the unit. A new cap badge is also to be created, but at time of writing its design had not yet been confirmed.



1RGR's mortar platoon in Japan, 2023. Until now, the heaviest artillery piece fielded by Gurkha units was the L16A2 mortar, but the KGA will operate larger systems CPL AARON STONE/MOD

Announced on April 28, it is the first time a Gurkha artillery regiment has been formed, with its first 'gunners' expected to be trained by November 2025 and the regiment filled in the next four years. The KGA will be trained to operate the L118 Light Gun, Archer self-propelled gun and Boxer RCH155 self-propelled gun.

The KGA will ostensibly be organised within the Brigade of Gurkhas but operate within the Royal Artillery. Rather than a self-deploying regiment, it is speculated that Gurkha batteries will be assigned to existing Royal Artillery regiments. The regiment could represent a 10% increase on the number of Gurkhas serving within the British Army – up to 4,400 personnel. Recruitment and selection in Nepal are highly competitive.

Army transfers AS-90 fleet to Ukraine

The British Army has withdrawn its AS-90 self-propelled guns from service earlier than planned and transferred the weapons to Ukraine.

Although only recently revealed, the final transfer appears to have taken place in September 2024. With the AS-90 originally expected to serve until at least 2030, it has emerged the last British exercises with the weapon system took place in Estonia in May 2024 with the vehicles subsequently withdrawn. Introduced in 1992, the AS-90 was among the world's most capable artillery systems and is still considered a viable fire support platform, despite being overtaken by newer systems.

The British Army originally produced 179, but numbers reduced significantly even before transfers to Ukraine began in 2023. It is now understood that 68 AS-90s have been supplied to Ukraine and, as of May 8, ten had been destroyed.

In 2024, the Royal Artillery received 14 Archer self-propelled guns from Sweden as interim vehicles to backfill the first AS-90s donated to Ukraine. Archer is more capable, but the procurement of just 14 guns means a huge gap in capability has been created. The Boxer RCH155 is expected to replace Archer from 2029, with 96 vehicles on order.

British Army AS-90s open fire in Iraq in 2008 RHONDA ROTH-CAMERON/US ARMY

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THE BATTLES OF THE MARNE AND AISNE

On this fantastic tour we visit key battlefields of the First World War on which French, American and British troops fought, and stunning memorials, dramatic scenery and a remarkable legacy of battle. The farms and villages where the blue and scarlet-clad French defeated the German advance in the Battle of the Marne survive today as they were in September 1914. In the Chemin des Dames and Champagne sectors, bunkers, caves and ghost villages are testament of fiercely destructive battles of 1915-1918 while a recently rediscovered trench network at Massiges is an astonishing insight into life in the front line.

6th - 11th September 2025 Simon Jones

Mons and Le Cateau

This tour focuses on both the first fights and high-command issues involving the British in August 1914: Mons, the subsequent retreat, the stands at Le Cateau and Landrecies and the contradictory strategic options.

31st August - 3rd September 2025 Simon Jones

Anzio & Cassino 1944

After the bloodbath of Salerno and then the torture of the Volturno crossings, the US and British troops of Mark Clark's 5th Army had to deal with the Axis Forces on the so-called Winter Line.

15th - 21st September 2025 Colonel David Harrison

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4th - 8th August 2025 Dr Bruce Cherry

The End in Italy

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Hood's last sailor dies in Canada

Victor Osborne in uniform and HMS *Vernon* cap tally – the navy's torpedo school BOTH IMAGES COURTESY OF THE OSBORNE FAMILY

A man believed to have been the last sailor who served with HMS *Hood* has died aged 106, **Allan George** reports

Victor Osborne served in the Royal Navy between 1934-1949 and enjoyed a long and eclectic career during which, in addition to serving with the battlecruiser HMS *Hood*, the pride of the Royal Navy, proved that British sailors are trained to face just about any challenge – Mickey Mouse included.

Osborne qualified as a torpedo specialist, but undertook a variety of other jobs. He was coxswain of a landing craft during the D-Day invasion, walked on the bottom of the Suez Canal and, immediately before the culmination of hostilities in August 1945, saw the flash of the atomic bomb over Nagasaki. After retiring from the navy, he became head of maintenance at Disneyland.

Osborne was born in Hackney, London, on November 11, 1918, into a family of 11 children. His father Edward had fought in the Second Boer War and World War One, only to be killed in the Luftwaffe's first daylight raid on London in 1940. Victor joined the navy aged just 15, embarking *Hood* in 1934. In 1937, during his last months on board, *Hood* sailed as part of the Franco-British non-intervention force, protecting merchant ships from interference during the Spanish Civil War.

He served with 11 ships and shore establishments, including the aircraft carrier *Eagle*, the submarine *Thunderbolt* and the destroyer *Quality*. In World War Two he saw service in the North and South Atlantic, the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. At one stage he was landed on Crete, narrowly escaping capture – as a torpedo and explosives specialist, he had been brought ashore from *Eagle* in a party charged with destroying an airfield. He later said: "We very nearly became POWs when German paratroopers dropped right on top of us."

Later, after the Italians planted mines in the Suez Canal, Osborne volunteered to walk along the bottom of the canal in a rebreathing suit to locate the devices. He then volunteered for service in submarines and joined the crew of *Thunderbolt*, the former *Thetis* that had sunk in Liverpool Bay, been recovered and renamed. But a head wound from his time in *Eagle*, when discovered, precluded further time in submarines. On June 6, 1944, his landing craft put troops ashore on D-Day, a moment that marked him for the rest of his life: "When the ramp went down, eight soldiers were killed by machine gun fire. I couldn't make another run after that as it shook me up so much. I blamed myself for their deaths."

A month later he was posted to *Quality*, which fought alongside the US Navy at Okinawa and was primarily tasked with rescuing downed airmen. He explained the method used by the ship: "We did a slow 13kts and sent a good swimmer off the forecastle with a cod line tied to his belt. He would grab hold of the airman and be drawn back to a net with two sailors waiting to lift the airman in his flight gear to our deck."

> *"When the ramp went down, eight soldiers were killed. I couldn't make another run after that... I blamed myself for their deaths"*

Victor Osborne at a recent Remembrance Day commemoration in his adoptive Canada

Two months later Osborne and his shipmates saw the flash from the atomic explosion at Nagasaki, and in September 1945 the ship anchored in Tokyo Bay for the official surrender of Japan.

Osborne married Joyce Fox in 1940 and they had two sons and a daughter. He left the navy in 1949 and worked as an electrician. The family emigrated in 1950 to Australia – Osborne likely impressed with the opportunities the country offered – and he worked on hydro-electricity schemes, schools and hospitals. The family then moved to British Columbia and, again in 1954, to California, where Victor was appointed head of maintenance at Disneyland. They returned to British Columbia in 1970 and Osborne took up a job at Esquimalt building destroyers. He retired in 1983.

He is best known today for his connection to *Hood*, arguably the pinnacle of battlecruiser design. She was lost in May 1941 during the Battle of the Denmark Strait, with just three of her then crew surviving. It was the navy's greatest single ship loss of the war.

BAW has reported twice before on the deaths of *Hood*'s 'final' crewmembers, information believed correct at the time. Osborne was only identified by the HMS Hood Association as the ship's last surviving sailor in 2020, leading to him writing a three-part biographical article for the association's *The Chough*.

Victor Osborne died in Nanaimo, British Columbia, on February 1, 2025. He is survived by his children Roger, Michael and Suzanne, and many grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Groundbreaking exhibition lifts lid on MI5 secrets

A new exhibition focusing on the role of the Britain's domestic security service has opened at The National Archives at Kew.

Craig Moore reports

MI5
OFFICIAL SECRETS

***MI5: Official Secrets* runs until September 28, 2025, at the National Archives in Kew, London**
IMAGES COURTESY OF CRAIG MOORE

For the first time in its history, Military Intelligence Section 5 (MI5) has officially collaborated with another institution to put together an exhibition explaining its long history, its successes and failures, and how it operates. Until September 28, 2025, the new free exhibition, *MI5: Official Secrets*, will be hosted by The National Archives at Kew.

Founded on October 7, 1909, MI5 is Britain's domestic counter-intelligence and security agency. It is part of the intelligence umbrella that collaborates with its partners, the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6), Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) and Defence Intelligence (DI). Its primary task is to protect British parliamentary democracy and economic interests, as well as to counter terrorism and espionage within the United Kingdom.

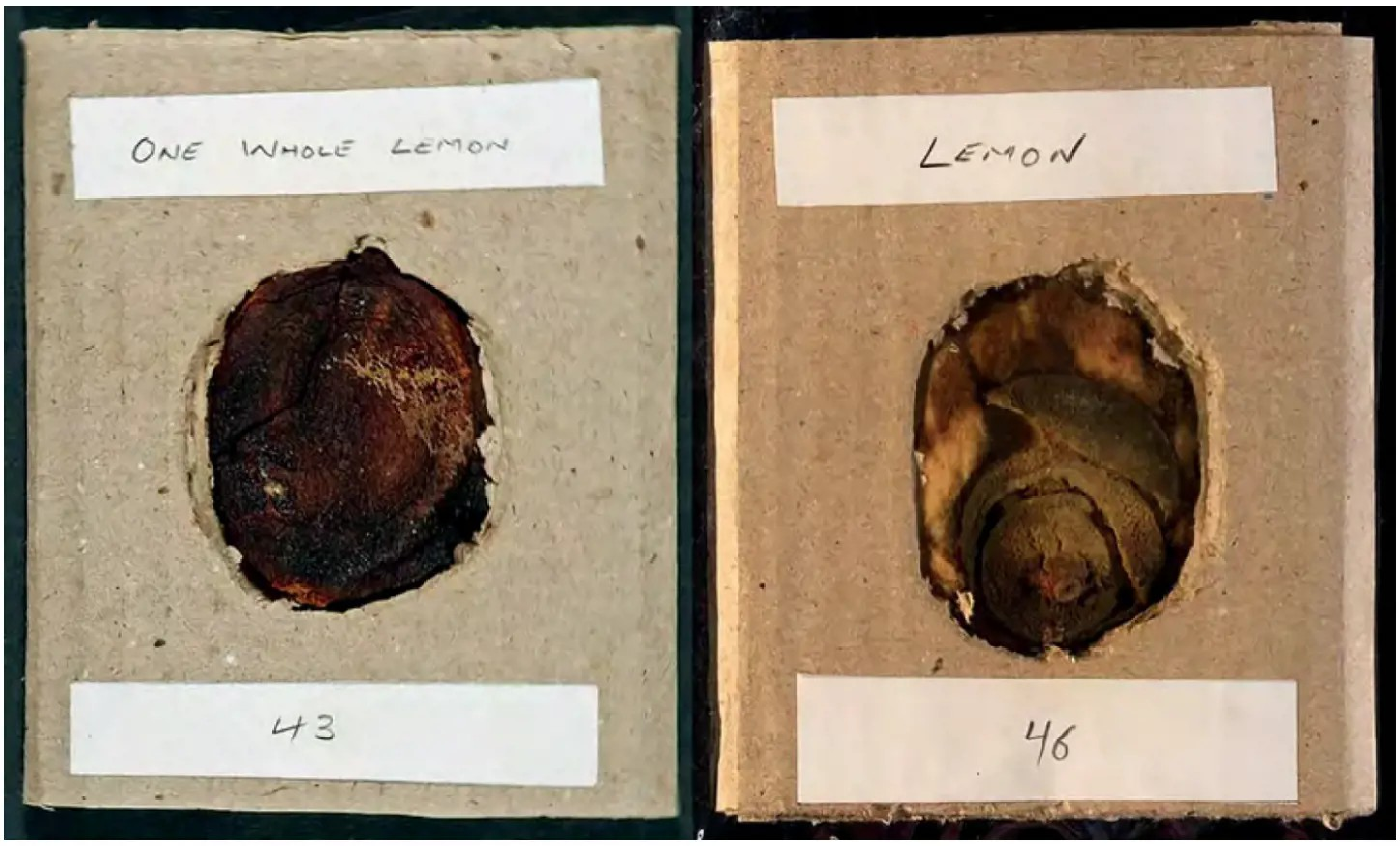
The groundbreaking new exhibition explores the ever-changing world of espionage and security threats using original declassified case files, reports and photographs, plus the real equipment used by spies and spy-catchers across the agency's 115-year history.

It also coincides with the release of more than 100 newly declassified MI5 files that have been digitised and made available on the National Archives website. Highlights include information on the investigation into the 'Cambridge Five' spy ring, namely Anthony Blunt, Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, Guy Burgess and John Cairncross, including transcripts of interrogations and bugged telephone calls, memos, reports and correspondence.

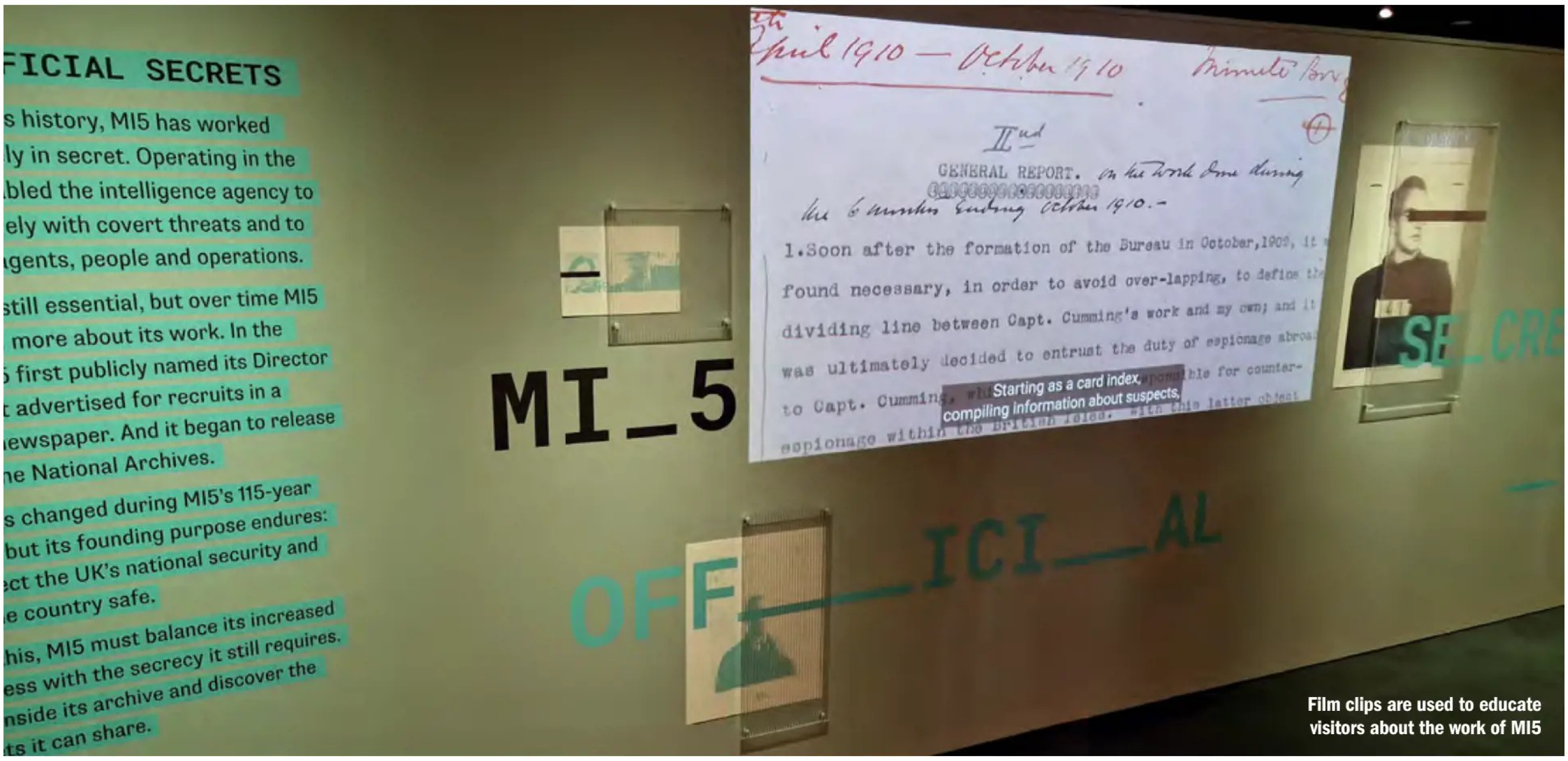
Some may find the inclusion of a shrivelled lemon within the MI5 exhibition strange, but this piece of spoiled fruit played an important part in the discovery of a spy operating in Britain during World War One. German Karl Muller landed in Hull on January 10, 1915, among a crowd of Belgium refugees. His Russian passport stated that he was a ship broker, but he was actually a spy. During the war, more than 4,000 workers were employed to examine the mail for anything suspicious, particularly any international mail sent to cover addresses used by German intelligence, and it was a letter sent by Muller to one such address in Rotterdam that was intercepted and handed to an MI5 officer. When opened, the note looked innocent enough, but when the officer passed a warm flat iron over it, a hidden message written in lemon juice – 'invisible ink' – was exposed.

An address was subsequently searched in Deptford High Street, London, and there, a pierced lemon and pen nib were found. Following this, a German-born baker named Hahn was arrested and interrogated, which in turn led to Muller's arrest. More lemons were found on his person and at his address.

Hahn was sentenced to seven years in prison, but Muller was executed at the Tower of London. MI5 continued to send letters to German Intelligence posing as Muller, which contained fabricated reports. The Germans were deceived and responded by sending 'Muller' money for his services and made requests for further information. The money was used to purchase a car for use by MI5 operatives, which was nicknamed *Muller*.



LEFT: **The lemon found in German spy Karl Muller's coat pocket when he was arrested.** RIGHT: **Pieces of lemon found with cotton wool in a drawer in Muller's lodgings**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Starting as a card index, compiling information about suspects.

Film clips are used to educate visitors about the work of MI5

The MI5 exhibition is arranged in broad chronological sections, taking the visitor through different historical periods. Both World Wars are covered, as is the rise of fascism and also communism in Britain. The later Cold War provided a lot of work for MI5, and this era also has its own section.

Another section covers the history of the Portland Spy Ring. This comprised five people who obtained classified research documents from the Admiralty Underwater Weapons Establishment (AUWE) on the Isle of Portland, Dorset, and passed them onto the Soviets. Two of the people involved were Harry Houghton, who was ex-Royal Navy, and Ethel Gee, a filing clerk who handled top secret documents.

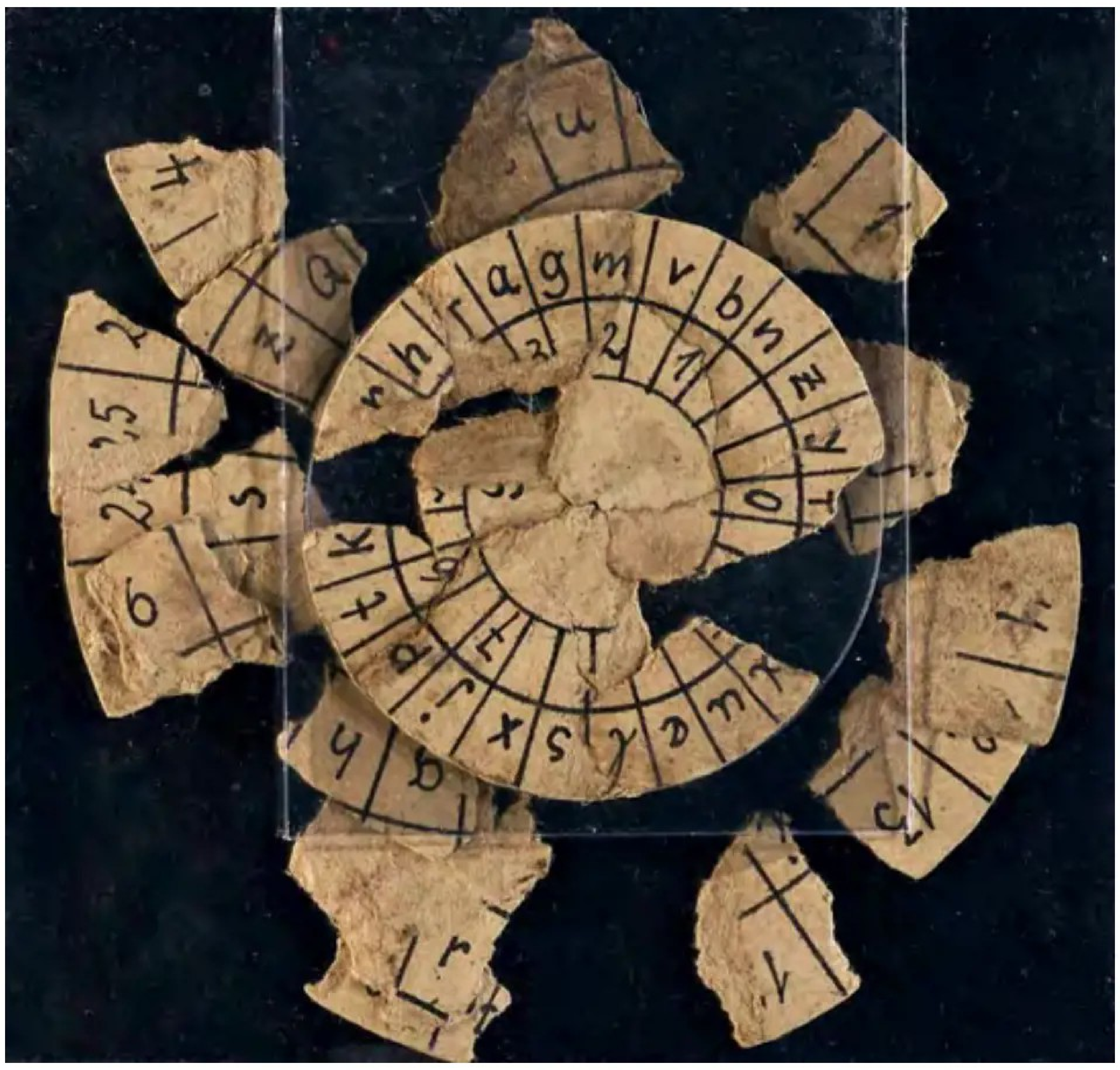
Successful double-cross operations also form part of the exhibition. During World War Two, MI5 was able to turn captured German agents working in Britain into spies for the Allied cause, who were then given false information to send to back to Berlin. Among them was double agent Juan Pujol García, codename 'Garbo', who was awarded the Iron Cross for service to German intelligence and an OBE from the British for his work in successfully deceiving the Germans.

Although the availability of declassified material declined around the late 1960s, exhibition curators have used press coverage and other sources to highlight some of the events MI5 has been involved with after that time period. As well as physical objects on display, audio-visual sections are used to tell the story of notable events such as the Iranian Embassy siege and the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie.

The large majority of the public confuses the separate roles of MI5 – the Security Service – and MI6 – the Secret Intelligence Service. Pleasingly, the exhibition does not sensationalise the work conducted by MI5 and although popular spy novels, TV series and Hollywood movies are action-packed and glamorous, in reality the majority of the work conducted by MI5 was, and remains, gathering information, analysing it and making threat assessments before suggesting various options. This seemingly 'mundane' data processing is MI5's raison d'être, with the fundamental function of the intelligence service being to protect the British people in the United Kingdom. It has been a big challenge for the *MI5: Official Secrets* design team to try and get this fact across to visitors.

Mark Dunton, lead curator and contemporary specialist at The National Archives, hopes visitors will gain a greater understanding of the origins, history and function of MI5 in defending Britain against its enemies. He said: "It is very commendable, in the spirit of openness, that MI5 have transferred their declassified files to the National Archives, including files on their triumphs as well as their disasters. The documents show the changing security threats faced by the United Kingdom."

Sir Ken McCallum, director general of MI5, said: "We are pleased to partner with The National Archives to share our history through *MI5: Official Secrets*. While much of our work must remain secret, this exhibition reflects our ongoing commitment to being open wherever we can." BW



This coding wheel was part of the evidence that helped convict German spy Josef Jakobs, the last person executed at the Tower of London in 1941

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Despatches

A presentation rifle and a George Cross were two highlights of recent bidding in auction rooms

SAINT-VALERY DSO AND FAMILY AWARDS TEMPT BUYERS

A family collection including a Distinguished Service Order awarded to a 51st Highlander captured at Saint-Valery-en-Caux has sold with auctioneers Richard Winterton

Major Harold Henry Merton, 23rd Field Artillery Regiment, was attached to the 51st Highland Division when he and approximately 8,000 fellow soldiers surrendered to Erwin Rommel's 7. Panzer-Division at Saint-Valery-en-Caux on June 12, 1940.

Merton was commissioned into the Royal Artillery as a second lieutenant on October 27, 1915. Post-war, Merton – promoted to captain – moved to India with the 63rd Field Battery, RA. In 1937, he returned to Britain and was promoted to major, a rank he held when war was declared on September 3, 1939.

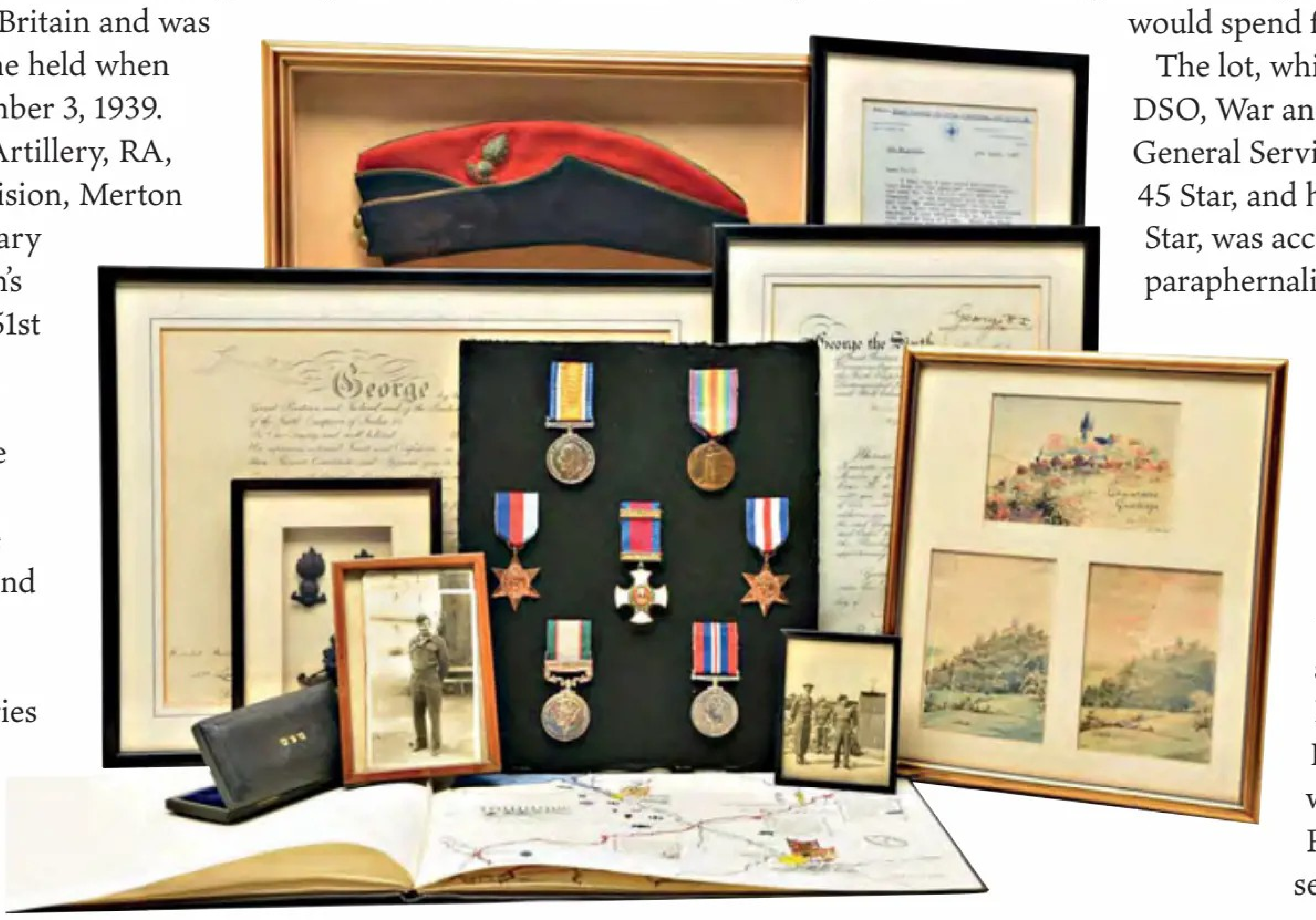
Now with the 23rd Field Artillery, RA, part of the 3rd Infantry Division, Merton departed for France in January 1940 and, in March, Merton's unit was transferred to the 51st Highland Infantry Division under Major-General Sir Victor Fortune. In April, the 51st was detached from the British Expeditionary Force and came under the command of the French Tenth Army. When Germany invaded France and the Low Countries on May 10, 1940, the 51st was stationed along the Maginot Line. As they were not part of the wider BEF in Belgium, the Highlanders were not evacuated from Dunkirk.

In response to the German advance, the 51st was pulled back to form a defensive line along the south banks of the Somme River. On June 4, the division was ordered to counterattack the German bridgehead at Abbeville, but was forced back. Fortune then requested permission to withdraw to Le Havre for evacuation. However, this was refused by the French commander, who ordered the British to retreat to the coast in tandem with remnants of the French IX Corps. Unfortunately, Rommel's armour cut off the line of retreat and Fortune was obliged to set up a perimeter around the port of Saint-Valery-en-Caux.

From there, Merton and his comrades hoped to be evacuated as part of Operation Aerial. Although a small fleet of ships had been assembled to rescue them, German shelling prevented the vessels from reaching the port. It was between June 10-12, while the Highlanders fought desperately to hold the perimeter, that Major Merton was awarded the DSO for "gallant and distinguished services in the field." Despite extensive research on behalf of auctioneers Richard Winterton, no copy of Merton's citation has yet been found, so the circumstances surrounding his award cannot be described.

At 0800hrs on June 12, French forces in the Saint-Valery area surrendered to the Germans. Surrounded, his allies now captured and with no means of replenishing supplies, Fortune gave the order for his men to surrender. Merton, along with all the men of his division, were marched off to Germany. From the British perspective, the surrender of the 51st Highlanders marked the end of Allied resistance in the Battle of France. Merton and other officers of the 51st were initially held in Oflag VII-C in Laufen Castle, before being moved to Oflag IX-A/H in Spangenberg Castle. Merton would spend five years as a POW.

The lot, which included Merton's DSO, War and Victory medals, India General Service Medal with Bar, 1939-45 Star, and his France and Germany Star, was accompanied by various paraphernalia and photographs relating to his service career and the time spent in German captivity. Also included were medals and regimental insignia belonging to Harold's son Richard, who served with the Devonshire Regiment and later joined the Parachute Regiment, and Harold's brother Leslie, who served with the 48th Royal Tank Regiment. The set fetched £3,500.



IMAGES: RICHARD WINTERTON

BRITISH GENERAL'S PRIZE RIFLE HITS THE MARK

A sporting rifle made by Holland & Holland and presented to a British officer drops the gavel

General Webb 'Gilly' Gillman joined the British Army in 1888 and, the following year, entered the Royal Field Artillery as a second gunner. He served in Ireland for five years, completing officer's training and commissioning as a lieutenant before transferring to British India.

A keen horseman, while in India Gillman honed his already proficient equestrian skills by playing polo and practicing 'pigsticking'. In 1898, he returned to Woolwich and participated in drag hunting until 1899, when he was sent to South Africa. During the Second Boer War, he joined General French's Cavalry Division in the Relief of Kimberley and was also present at the battles of Paardeberg and Driefontein and the capture of Bloemfontein.

Promoted to captain in 1900, Gillman joined the Aro Expedition in Southern Nigeria, during which he was Mentioned in Despatches and awarded the DSO after leading the first assault party "over a stiff stockade". He became a major in 1905, then lieutenant-colonel in 1914, having worked in the War Office.

Gillman saw extensive service throughout World War One and was highly decorated, including ten Mentions in Despatches. In 1914, he had command of the 114th Field Battery, RFA, within the 1st Division and saw action at

IMAGE: WILSON55

Mons, along the Marne and at the crossing of Aisne. During the First Battle of Ypres in 1915, he acted as special liaison officer between Generals Sir John French and Sir Douglas Haig. He was next sent to Gallipoli, serving under General Sir Charles Monro, further distinguishing himself during the evacuation from the peninsula. One private wrote: "I don't know how we should have ever got out of this show without Webb Gillman."

In 1916, Gillman was promoted to brevet colonel and sent to Mesopotamia, acting as liaison officer between the War Office and Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force. He was promoted to major-general in 1917, after which he commanded the 17th (Indian) Division. Gillman returned home in 1919 to be given command of the Catterick Camp Demobilisation Centre, before, in 1920, serving for four years as commandant of the Royal Military Academy, before being appointed as inspector of Royal Field Artillery.

In 1926, he observed the French in their campaign in the Moroccan Rifi as the sole foreign attaché invited. Later in his career, Gillman was the head of a commission report on the defences in Singapore, as well as Master General of Ordnance. He was promoted to full general in 1931, made GOC Eastern Command and died in office two years later, aged 62.

During his service in India, Gillman won a .295-calibre rook rifle, serial 10646, made by prestigious gunmaker Holland & Holland. It features a 26in octagonal barrel, chequered stock and fixed 50-yard and folding 100-yard sights. At some point in its history, the rifle was rechambered for .22LR, a common recreational shooting calibre. The rifle is engraved with 'Holland and Holland, 98 New Bond Street London, Winner of the Field Rifle Trials 1883', while an added silver plaque reveals Gillman's prize-winning exploits: 'RM Academy Steeplechase 1st Prize, Presented to W Gillman 9th May 1888'.

Sold with a green canvas and leather Rigby labelled case and a leatherbound copy of '*Gilly*' *An Appreciation*, the lot sold by Wilson55 fetched £550. As a fully functional firearm, the winning bidder required a UK firearms licence with a .22 rifle variation or had to be a registered firearms dealer.

RM ACADEMY
STEEPLECHASE
1ST PRIZE
Presented by the Staff
9TH MAY 1888.
W.GILLMAN.

IMAGE: NOONANS

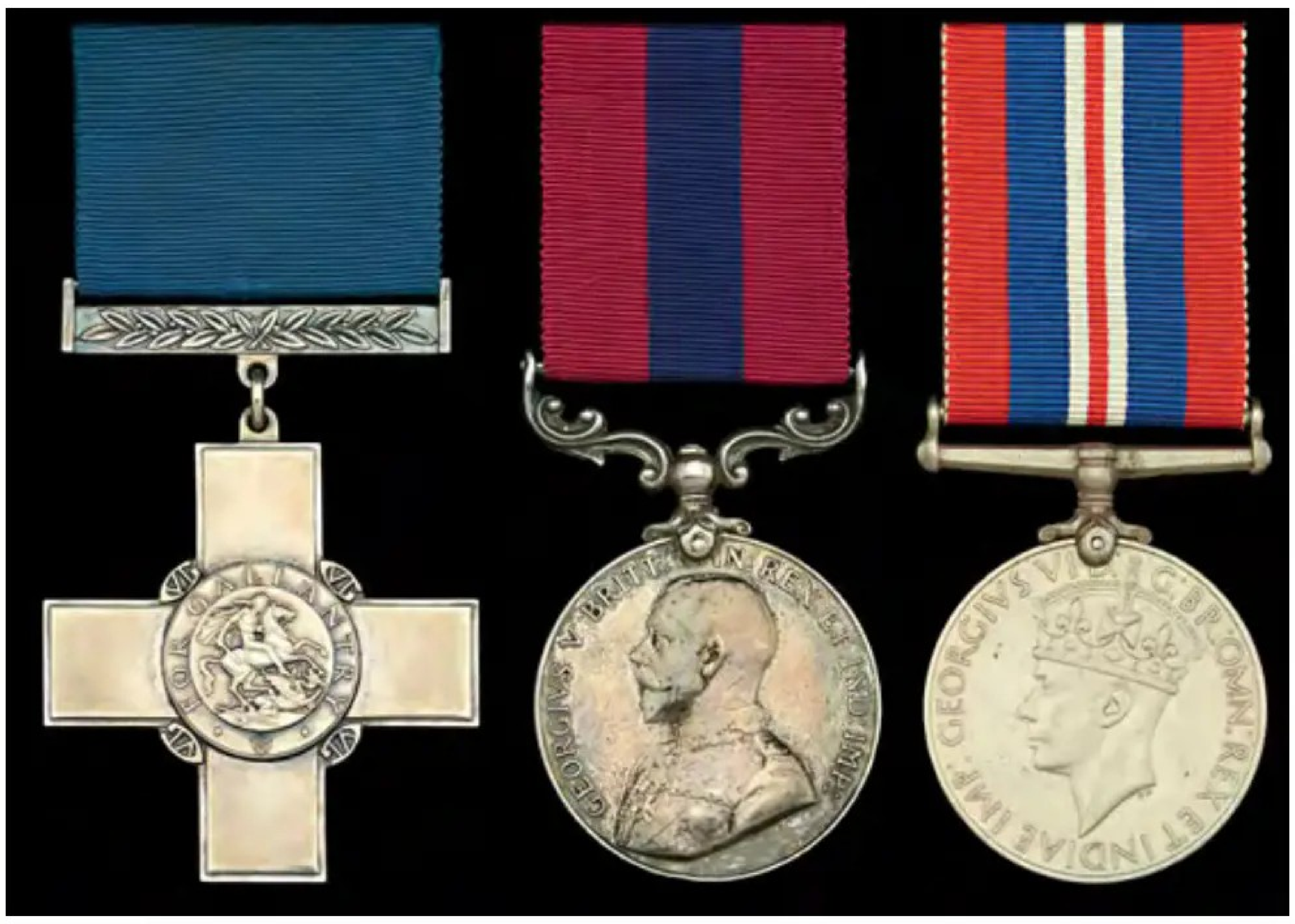
LIFESAVER'S GC FETCHES £12,000

An exchanged George Cross awarded to a DCM holder, who rescued a future air chief marshal from freezing waters off the Kent coast, interested buyers at Noonans

Corporal Thomas McTeague was in the right place at the right time when, on December 10, 1929, he witnessed an aircraft crash into freezing waters off the Isle of Sheppey. Little would he know that the pilot officer he swam out to rescue would later become Air Chief Marshal of the RAF.

Born in Belfast on October 2, 1893, Thomas volunteered for the Royal Irish Rifles in 1914 and was posted to the Western Front with the 2nd Battalion. During the Battle of Passchendaele in October 1917, McTeague was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for "conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty" by single-handedly capturing two enemy parties, delivering an important message while wounded and refusing to have his wound dressed until the conclusion of the operation.

McTeague enlisted in the RAF in 1921 and was posted to the Middle East. As an air gunner in twin-engine biplanes, he recalled leaning out of his aircraft to drop 5lb bombs on insurgents. It was while at the RAF's Armament and Gunnery School on Sheppey that McTeague was awarded the EGM for his actions in saving Pilot Officer Hugh Constantine (later Air Chief Marshal Sir Constantine, KBE, CB, DSO). Constantine had crashed his Siskin fighter into the sea 200 yards from the shore and McTeague and Flying Officer Walter Anderson entered the "bitterly cold and choppy sea" to assist him. An exhausted McTeague was the first to reach Constantine, finding him in a "complete state of shock". After Anderson arrived, the two swam Constantine to safety, "undoubtedly saving his life". For their part in rescuing Constantine, the pair were both given EGMs, receiving the awards at an investiture on July 9, 1929. On September 23, 1941, McTeague's award was exchanged for the new George Cross.


FOR GALLANTRY
GEORGIVS V BRITT: OMN: REX ET IND: IMP:
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During World War Two, McTeague served as a recruiting sergeant in Belfast, before being promoted to warrant officer at RAF Abingdon. He died on February 28, 1961.

The lot, comprising McTeague's George Cross, Distinguished Conduct Medal and War Medal 1939-45, reached its guide price of £12,000 with Noonans.

FORTHCOMING SALES

- **Adam Partridge Auctioneers & Valuers** June 5-6, 2025
- **Noonans** June 11 & July 16, 2025
- **Lacy, Scott & Knight** June 13, 2025
- **Vectis Auctions** June 18, 2025
- **Warwick & Warwick** June 18 & August 20, 2025
- **Griffin's Auctioneers & Valuers** June 24, 2025
- **Tennants Auctioneers** June 25, 2025
- **McTear's** July 30, 2025
- **Wilson55** August 6, 2025
- **Harper Field Auctioneers & Valuers** August 6-7, 2025

NOTE: Listings include medals, militaria, arms and armour, war art and other historical-themed sales. Dates and catalogues are subject to change. Check websites for details and updates.

Debrief

We used Google Trends to find six common questions on the **Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran** and one of our experts gives informed answers

THIS MONTH'S HISTORIAN: **TOM BAKER**

Why did the British and Soviets invade Iran?

Codenamed Operation Countenance, the joint Anglo-Soviet invasion of neutral Iran – which took place between August 25 to September 17, 1941 – was carried out for three critical reasons: Removing German influence from the territory, securing the nation's oil and optimising Lend-Lease routes into the Soviet Union.

Although Iran had declared neutrality under the rule of Reza Shah Pahlavi, by 1940, Britain had becaome increasingly worried about the presence of thousands of German nationals in Iran, a concern echoed by the Soviets following Germany's invasion in June 1941. Although the Allies urged the Shah to expel German nationals, the monarch refused. Following the outbreak of anti-Allied protests across Iran, the two nations became convinced Iran was sympathetic to Nazi interests.

Britain also feared that the vital Abadan Oil Refinery, owned by the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, might fall under German influence. A direct Anglo-Soviet seizure of the refinery was seen as crucial for the Allied war effort because, in 1940 alone, the site had produced eight million tonnes of oil for Britain.

Last, with the Germans making steady progress in their invasion of the Soviet Union, an all-weather alternative to the Arctic Convoys was required to continue supplying the Soviets with Lend-Lease supplies. Securing the north-south trans-Iranian railway running from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea was deemed the best course of action.

How did the Anglo-Soviet invasion force compare to the Iranian military?

The combined Anglo-Soviet invasion force numbered some 60,000 fighting men, and it faced an Iranian military strength of roughly 126,000 troops.

British forces were already present in Iraq under Iraq Command – renamed Persia and Iraq Command, or Paiforce, six days after the invasion begain. Britain committed limited Royal and Royal Australian Navy assets while on the ground it sent in a large Anglo-Commonwealth force comprising the 8th and 10th Indian Infantry Divisions, the 2nd Indian Armoured Brigade, the 4th Cavalry Brigade (later the 9th Armoured Brigade) and the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade under the command of Lieutenant-General Edward Quinan. The British armour largely comprised armoured cars and Vickers Mark IVb light tanks.

The Soviets invaded with 1,000 T-26 tanks and men of the 44th and 47th Armies of the Transcaucasia Front, as well as the 53rd Army of the Central Asian Military District, under the command of Generals Dmitry Kozlov and Sergei Trofimenko.

In response, the Iranian Imperial Military fielded nine infantry divisions and two armoured divisions. Although the Shah had taken steps to modernise his military before the invasion, including acquiring 100 FT-6 (FT-17) and CKD TNH 60 (Pz.

Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1931. By 1940, the British had become concerned the monarch was sympathetic to Nazi German interests UNKNOWN AUTHOR

Kpfw 38(t)) tanks and CKD AH-IV tankettes for the 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions, as well as 100 LaFrance TK-6 armoured cars and 120 75mm howitzers, his modernisations were not fully complete by 1941 and the armoured vehicles acquired were largely already outdated.

What role did British and Soviet aircraft play?

In the first 12 hours of August 25, 160 aircraft of the RAF and Soviet Air Force – mainly Bristol Blenheim IVs, Hawker Hurricane's and Gloster Gladiators – conducted joint strikes on the principal Iranian airbases at Tehran, Ahvaz, Tabriz and Mashad. The Iranian Air Force (IIAF), which comprised 122 aircraft – primarily obsolete Hawker-built types such as the Audax and Fury, but also 15 modern Curtiss P-40s – was wiped out on the ground, ensuring Allied air superiority from day one.

Meanwhile, bombers struck marshalling yards, lines of communication and vital infrastructure in Tehran, Qazvin, Ardabil and Rasht, while Anglo-Soviet ground forces were provided with an uninterrupted line of advance as Iranian troop concentrations and artillery positions were attacked by high explosives. Leaflets written in Persian were also dropped on major population centres, urging surrender.

The combined psychological and material damage inflicted by the air campaign contributed to the capitulation of Iranian military units and the sudden collapse of the Shah's regime.

How did the ground campaign unfold?

The invasion began at 0400hrs on August 25 with an amphibious landing at Shatt al-Arab, where battalions of the 8th Indian Division and 24th Indian Brigade seized the critical Abadan Oil Refinery. Meanwhile, the remaining battalions of the 8th Division advanced to Qasr Sheikh, before continuing onto Ahvaz by August 27. Here, the Iranians prepared a strong defence with dug-in tanks and artillery. Multiple British assaults were repelled, but by August 29, news reached the garrison commander of the Iranian ceasefire and the fighting stopped.

Further north, eight battalions under Major-General William Slim advanced from Khanaqin and took the Naft-i-Shah oilfield on August 25, before moving on to Gilan-e-Garb, the gateway to the key Pai Tak Pass. The position was taken on August 27 after the Iranian defenders withdrew in the night, and the Anglo-Indians subsequently took the city of Shahabad before capturing the regional capital of Kheramshan.

Meanwhile, the Soviets invaded from Transcaucasia. The 47th Army captured Jolfa, before pushing on to take the regional capital of Tabriz by August 28. At the same time, the 53rd Army skirted the west coast of the Caspian Sea toward the major city of Adabil. Although heavily defended, the regional commander fled, instructing vital supply trucks to divert from their orders and carry his extensive personal baggage train. The city soon fell, followed by Tabriz a day later.

On the coast of the Caspian Sea, the 44th Army seized the port city of Astara before capturing the cities of Rasht and Bandar Pahlavi by August 27. At Bandar Pahlavi, Iranian troops made their second decisive stand of the war, blunting Soviet infantry assaults with howitzers and sinking barges in the harbour to block amphibious landings.

After taking Tabriz, elements of the 53rd Army advanced along the Tehran-Tabriz Highway and captured Mianeh, before moving towards Qazvin, Saveh and Qom on August 29, taking the Tehran-Saveh-Persian Gulf highway and cutting Iran in two. On August 30, British and Soviet forces linked up at Senna and Kazvin to the west of Tehran.

SMOKING NOT ALLOWED
SMOKING NOT ALLOWED
Anglo-Indian troops entering the Abadan Oil Refinery on August 25, 1941 ICRI

By August 29, it had become clear to the Shah that his military had been decisively defeated and he ordered his troops to end all resistance after negotiating a ceasefire with invading Anglo-Soviet commanders.

However, against the orders of the Allies, the Shah secretly evacuated German nationals from Iran. When the Soviets learned of his defiance, they occupied Tehran on September 17. The Shah subsequently abdicated and was replaced by his son, while the country was partitioned between Britain and the Soviets for the duration of World War Two.

How many losses were suffered by all sides?

Total casualties in the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran were slight in comparison to other campaigns of World War Two. General Quinan's forces suffered 22 killed and 50 wounded – the majority from the 8th Indian Division during the attempted assaults on Ahvaz. The Soviets, on the other hand, lost 40 killed and an unknown number of wounded. The Iranians suffered 850 soldiers and 450 civilians killed, while 1,500 were wounded.

What were the long-term effects of the Anglo-Soviet occupation of Iran?

By taking the critical trans-Iranian railway, the Persian Corridor enabled the Allies to provide the Soviets with an additional five million tonnes of Lend-Lease materiel – equivalent to £136 billion today – while the British established an additional logistics channel to support its forces fighting in North Africa.

The new Shah signed a treaty with the Allies in January 1942, under which the country began contributing non-military assistance to the wider Allied war effort and, a year later, Iran officially declared war on Germany. However, during the Anglo-Soviet occupation, grain and other essential food items were requisitioned to support the wider war effort, leading to cases of famine and hyperinflation. BW

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Revenge on HMS *Iron Duke*

The superb interview with Nicholas Jellicoe about his grandfather, Admiral Lord John Jellicoe (*Jutland vs the U-boats: Jellicoe's greatest victory?, BAW*, May 2025), rightly featured the significant role the dreadnought battleship HMS *Iron Duke* played as his flagship when he commanded the Grand Fleet.

During the main fleet action at Jutland, *Iron Duke's* 13.5in guns inflicted severe damage to the German dreadnought battleship SMS *König*. *Iron Duke* was later converted as a gunnery training ship as a result of the 1930 London Naval Treaty and, at the start of World War Two, was anchored at the main base for the Royal Navy's Home Fleet at Scapa Flow as an accommodation and harbour defence ship.

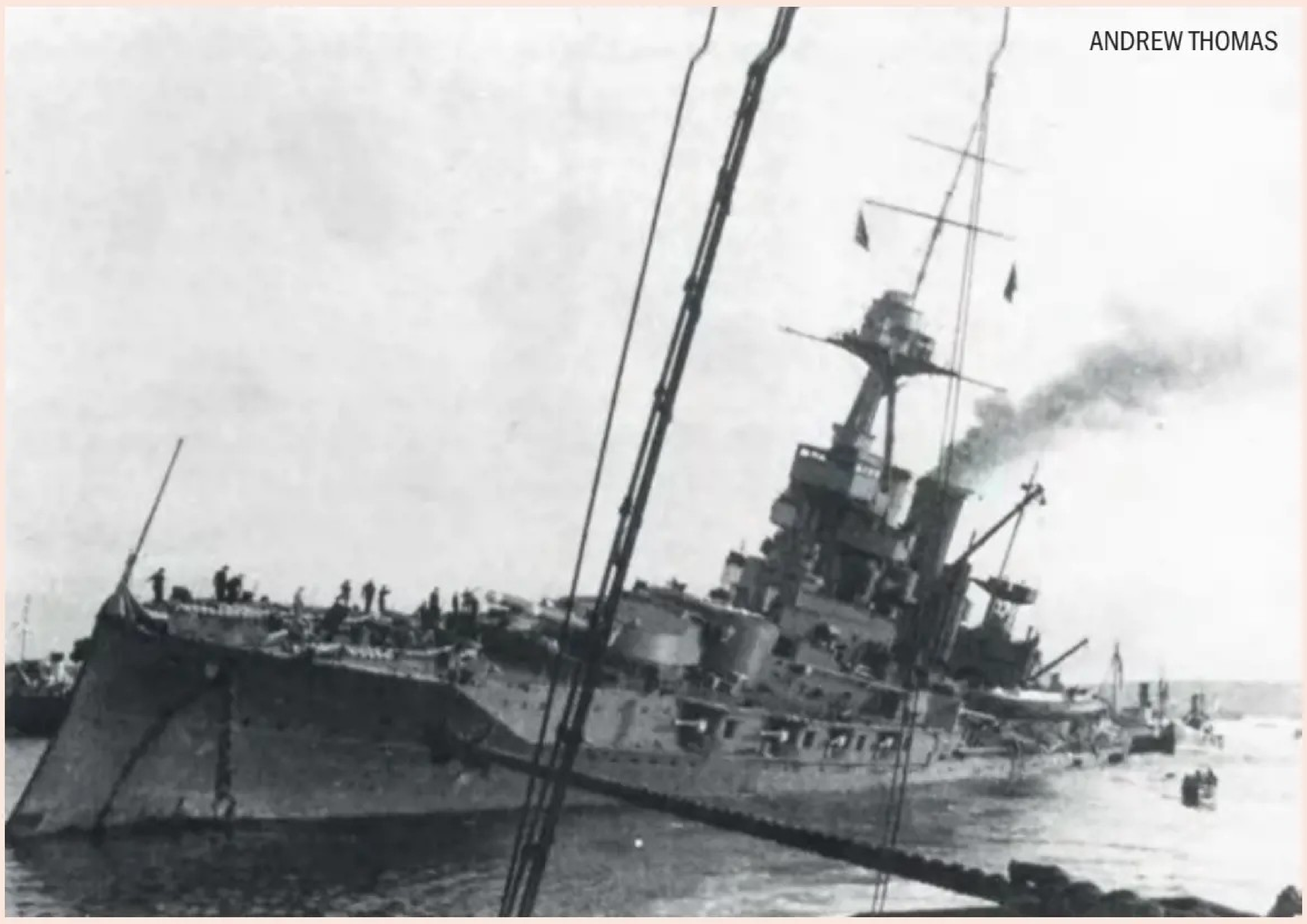
Here, the Germans took their revenge. Scapa was a key target for the Luftwaffe and, on October 17, 1939, four Junkers Ju 88As of Stab 1./KG 30 led by Hauptmann Fritz Doench and 13 Heinkel He 111s of I./KG 26 attacked the anchorage. Although anti-aircraft fire shot down Oberleutant Walter Fläming's Ju 88, *Iron Duke* was badly damaged by several near misses that flooded a boiler room and two magazines

Having developed a significant list to port, she was beached at Ore Bay to avoid her sinking. This attack, coming within days of the sinking by U-47 of *Royal Oak* as she berthed in Scapa Flow, resulted in the temporary withdrawal of the Home Fleet from the base until its defences were improved.

Iron Duke remained there and continued to serve as an anti-aircraft platform for the duration of the war, being eventually refloated and broken up during the late 1940s. Her bell is displayed at Winchester Cathedral.

The attached image shows *Iron Duke* listing.

Andrew Thomas


ANDREW THOMAS

Bulldogs in action

An update concerning the editor's FV432 article (*The squaddies' chariot, BAW*, Oct 24). He wrote that Ukraine operates a number of FV432s and that none have been lost, which was correct at the time of writing. However, as of May 6, 2025, four FV432 Bulldogs have been destroyed and four captured. Interestingly, the Ukrainian vehicles appear to have been fitted with a large frame, ostensibly to deploy camouflage netting.

As of the same date, it was verified that Ukraine had lost 8,700 vehicles in its defence against Russian forces and about half were combat vehicles, including 1,164 tanks. The losses include two Challenger 2s, a Challenger ARV and other British-supplied vehicles. This pales in comparison with the 21,600 vehicles Russia is confirmed to have lost – it has lost almost as many tanks (3,960) as Ukraine has total combat vehicles.

Such statistics do little to show how effective a vehicle is – in war, things get destroyed and people get hurt – but they do highlight the scale of the challenge Ukraine faces and why Europe must do what it can to support its citizens.

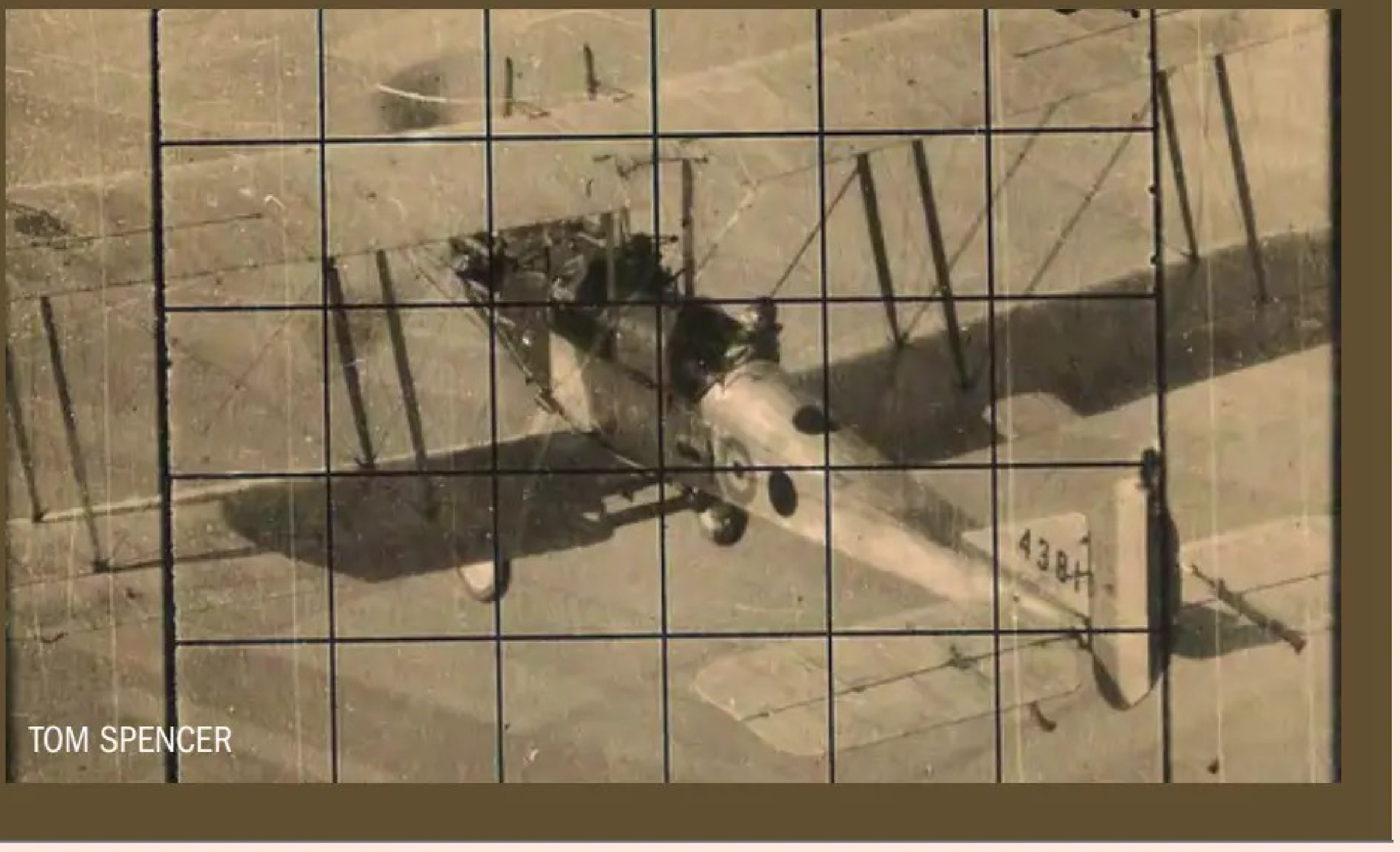
Craig O'Dell

Gunner's-eye view

The *Gun, camera, action* section of the May issue's *Despatches* column described the Hythe Aerial Camera Gun G3 (Mk. III) and the sale of such an item via Ryedale Auctioneers. The article showed photographs of the device, as well as one installed on an aircraft and also described the ring or square markings applied to glass slides and positioned in the focal plane to better assess the accuracy of a trainee air gunner. I have enclosed a photograph taken in 1916 showing this distinctive grid pattern, revealing how an 'enemy' aircraft – in this case a BE.2c fighter, serial 4381 of 10 Squadron, RFC – would appear to the gunner when using the Hythe device.

I hope readers find this unusual perspective interesting – plus, if you look closely, you can see an airman looking back, perhaps wondering if he has just 'bought it'!

Tom Spencer


TOM SPENCER

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Hubert von Herkomer's 1890 portrait of Kitchener captures a commanding personality and stature befitting of Britain's imperial enforcer ALAMY ART COLLECTION

More than a great poster?

British propaganda literally made Horatio Kitchener – 'K of K' – World War One's most famous face, yet there was more to the field marshal than a print icon. Marking the 175th anniversary of Earl Kitchener's birth, **Dr Graham Goodlad** examines the career of Britain's best-known imperial strongman

More than a century on, the poster is still instantly recognisable. The moustachioed face topped by a field marshal's peaked cap; the commanding gaze; the finger pointing – this was the image that impelled a generation to fight for king and country. Usually known as the *Your country needs you* poster – the slogan that featured on some versions – it depicted imperial Britain's most famous soldier.

Lord Kitchener of Khartoum – 'K of K' for short – earned public recognition as conqueror of the Sudan and then, from November 1900, as commander of Britain's armies in the Second Boer War. Appointed War Secretary in August 1914, he was the only military man in a civilian government. The Prime Minister, Herbert Henry Asquith, believed his unique prestige and experience were what Britain needed as it went to war. Tasked with raising and organising a mass army for a continental conflict, Kitchener embodied the struggle against the Kaiser's Germany. His loss at sea two years later, when the Royal Navy cruiser carrying him on a secret mission to Russia was sunk, deeply affected the public. In the aftermath, a range of conspiracy theories circulated about the cause of his dramatic disappearance.

Kitchener had an extensive and unusual life and remains a controversial figure. Both in his own lifetime and afterwards, his numerous admirers were balanced by critics – as high ranking as Queen Victoria herself – who regarded him as a harsh, autocratic agent of colonial domination. Cabinet colleagues who viewed him at close quarters doubted his capacity to move successfully from the battlefield to Whitehall. "Kitchener was not a great man, but at least he was a great poster," was the cutting remark variously attributed to Margot Asquith, wife of the prime minister, and his daughter, Elizabeth. Biographers have been no less divided over Kitchener's personality and achievements. So how are we to assess his reputation as we approach the 175th anniversary of his birth?

Imperial apprenticeship

Kitchener's upbringing explains a great deal about his austere, impenetrable image. His father, Henry Horatio Kitchener, was an army officer turned Anglo-Irish landowner – but also an eccentric figure who imposed strict discipline. The young Horatio Herbert Kitchener is supposed to have been staked out on the croquet lawn for some minor infraction.

The second of four sons (he also had a sister, Frances), Kitchener was educated at home, leaving him with important gaps in his knowledge. Before his 13th birthday, the family relocated from rural Ireland to Switzerland for the sake of his mother's declining health. After her death, his father remarried and emigrated to New Zealand, leaving his son to pursue a military career in the Royal Engineers.

The first decade of Kitchener's service was largely devoted to unremarkable surveying expeditions in Palestine and Cyprus. He was a deeply private

Sirdar Kitchener (centre), CO of the Anglo-Egyptian expedition into the Sudan, with Major-General Sir William Gatacre (CO Brigade of the Nile), Gatacre's orderly, Lieutenant Ronald Brooke (7th Hussars) and aide-de-camp Captain James Watson (Kings Royal Rifles) at the start of the campaign OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

> ***"Both in his own lifetime and afterwards, Kitchener's numerous admirers were balanced by critics – as high ranking as Queen Victoria – who regarded him a harsh, autocratic agent of colonial domination"***

individual, relaxed in a small circle of friends but generally viewed as reserved and unapproachable. A cast in his eye [Strabismus] added to the impression that he disliked engaging with others. Nevertheless, at approximately 6ft 2in, taller than the average Victorian male, he was a commanding figure – one curious document in the New Zealand Archives reveals that in 1913 his height was confirmed to be "about 6ft and 3¾in", though it remains a mystery why the enquiry was lodged.

However, he was generally popular with Queen Victoria, serving as her aide-de-camp in 1888, and in 1900 the monarch paid £263 for a portrait painting of the imperial hero in the Sudan, donning khaki drill with a Sam Browne belt. Kitchener was also particularly friendly with King George V and Queen Mary of Teck.

Kitchener's peers respected his ability while noting his astonishing insensitivity and single-minded ambition. Some later writers suggested he was a repressed homosexual, a belief linked to his surprising taste for collecting porcelain and preference for the company of younger, single officers. But no serious study has found convincing evidence of this. In fact, had she not died prematurely, in his early thirties he was expected to marry the 18-year-old daughter of family friends.

It was the complex situation in Egypt and the Sudan that made Kitchener into a national figure. Egypt was then a British client state – a 'veiled protectorate' – nominally subject to the overlordship of the Ottoman Empire but unofficially under British administration as an unincorporated territory, governed by a viceroy: the Khedive. The key figure was the Consul-General, Sir Evelyn Baring (later Lord Cromer), who managed Egypt's finances and reorganised its army. He had been installed in 1883, following the suppression of a nationalist uprising that threatened control of the Suez Canal.

Britain's de facto rule of Egypt brought with it responsibility for the Sudan. Here a rebellion led by a charismatic religious figure, Muhammad Ahmad, known as the Mahdi, broke out. Unwilling to be drawn into an open-ended commitment, the British government instructed General Charles Gordon to organise the withdrawal of the outlying Anglo-Egyptian garrisons there. Instead, Gordon decided to make a stand in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, leading to a nine-month siege. Major Kitchener was part of the relief expedition reluctantly sent by Gladstone's Liberal government to relieve Khartoum in the second half of 1884. Famously, the force arrived too late to prevent the taking of the city and the massacre of its defenders. The Mahdi died soon afterwards, to be succeeded by one of his lieutenants, Khalifa Abd Allahi.

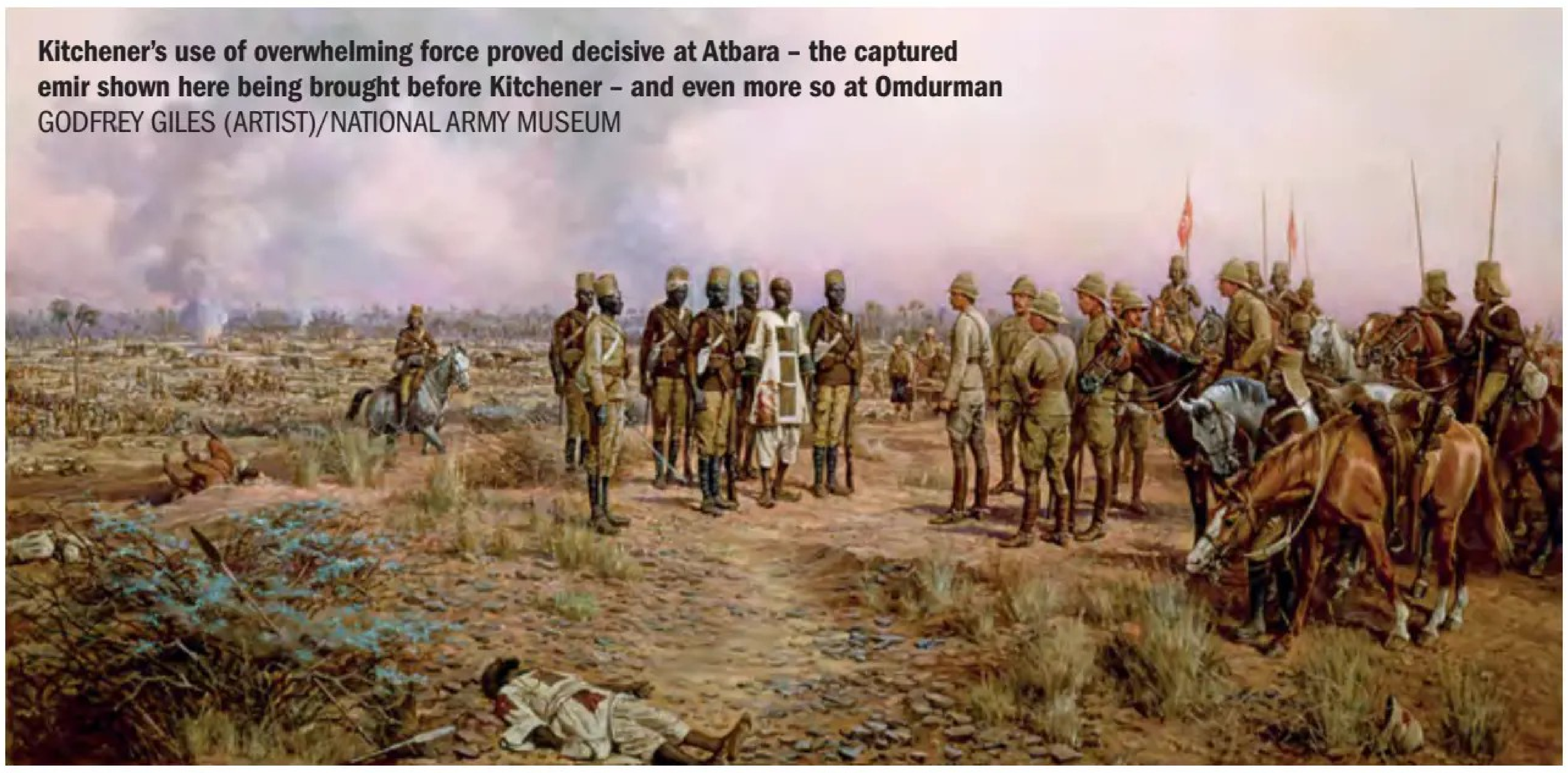
The route to Omdurman

The experience left a deep impression on Kitchener. He idolised Gordon and felt anger at the fatal delay in dispatching the Nile Expedition. For more than a decade, his career was to be inextricably linked with the region. Surprisingly, the austere, unsociable Kitchener forged connections not only with Baring but with the Conservative Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, as well as Queen Victoria. Networking of this kind, allied to his very real ability, assisted Kitchener's rise to the key post of Sirdar – C-in-C – of Egyptian forces, by the age of 41.

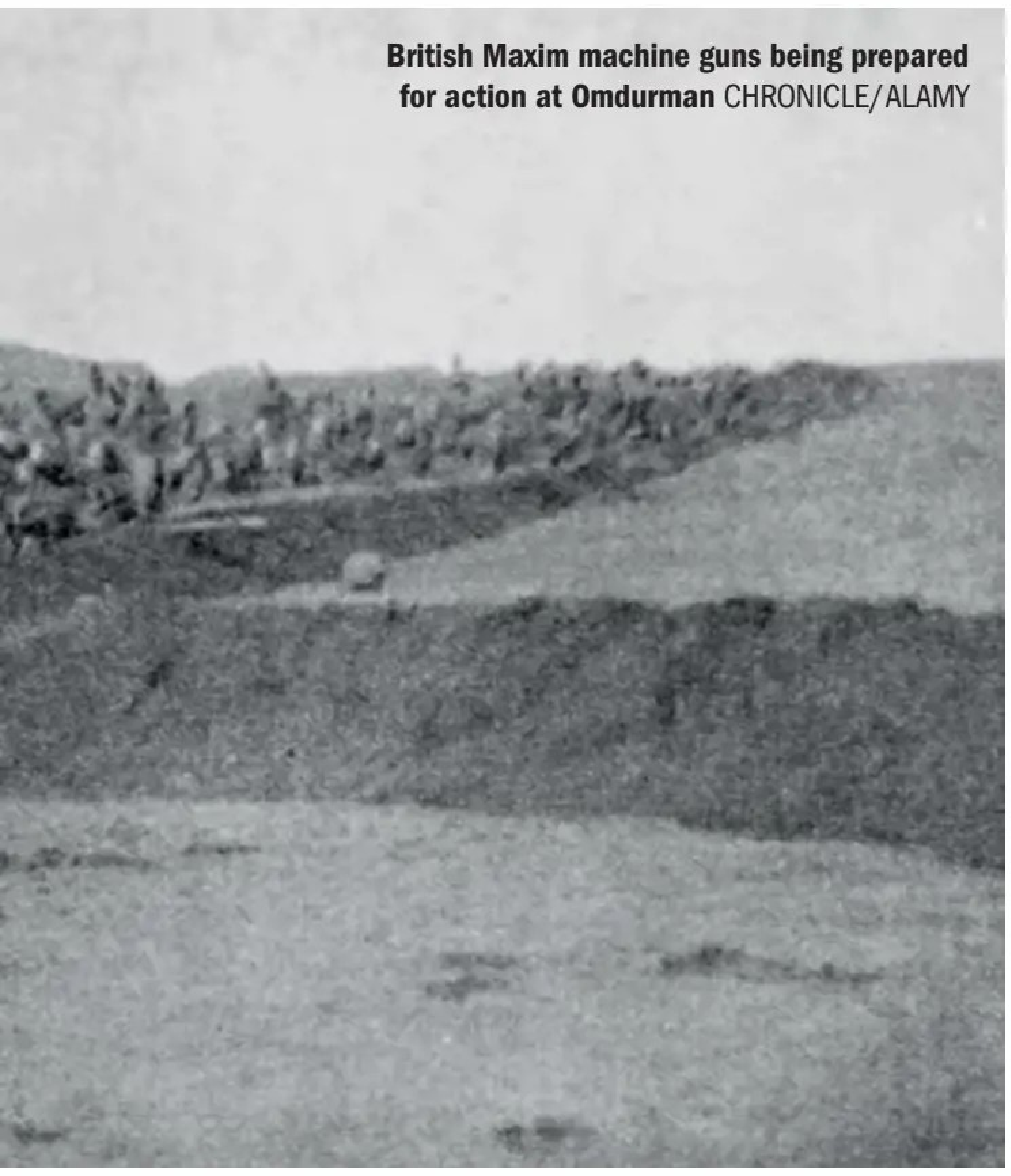
Fearful of the cost and risk of failure, the government was slow to commit to the reconquest of the Sudan. What tipped the balance, in March 1896, was Salisbury's alarm at news of French penetration of the Nile Valley, raising the prospect of an imperial rival gaining a foothold.

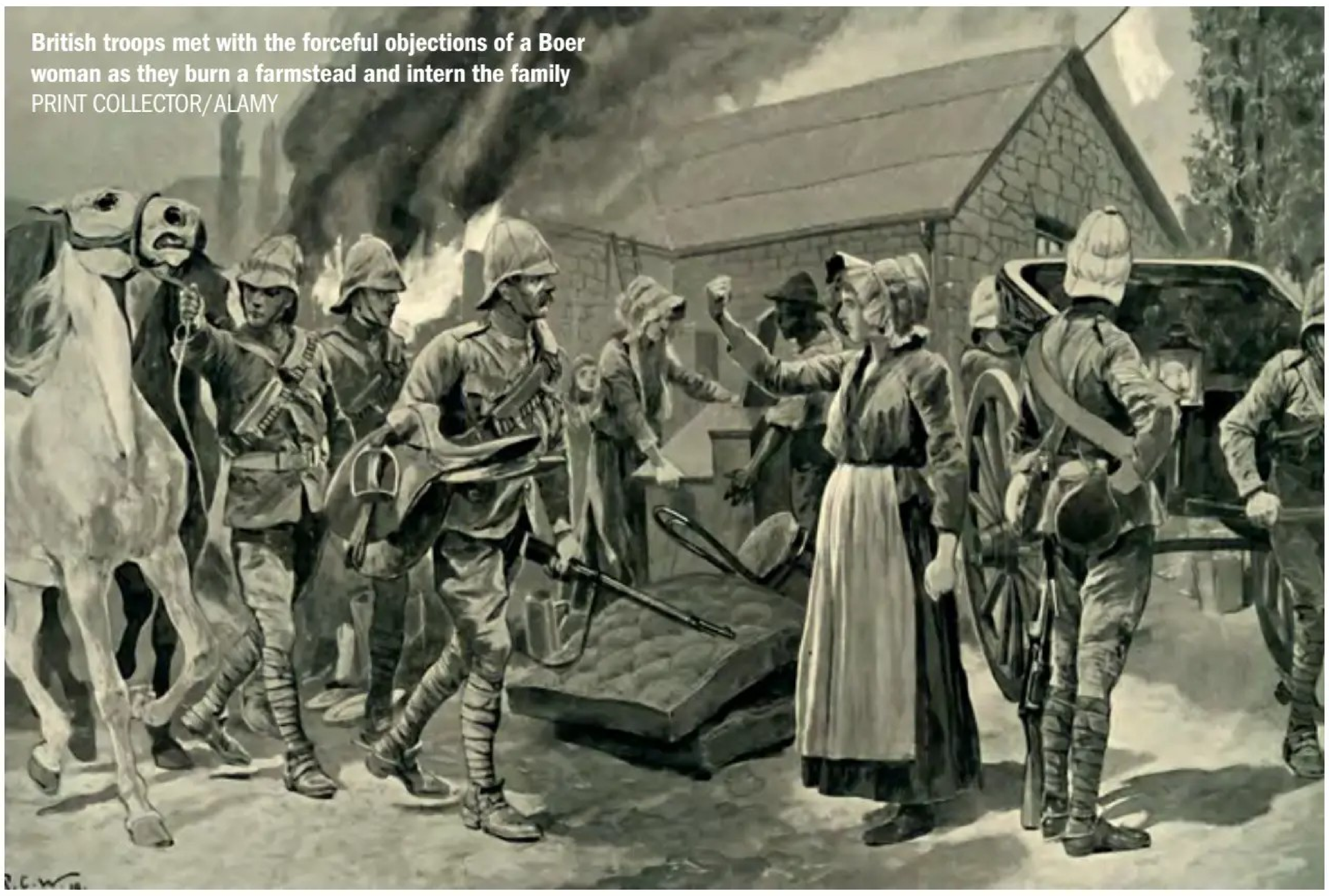
The final straw was an apparently unrelated development, the unexpected defeat of Italians by the Ethiopians at Adwa. Fearing the catastrophe might encourage a wider Mahdist resurgence, Britain responded to the Italians' plight by agreeing to stage a diversion in northern Sudan. This gave Kitchener the opportunity for which he had longed, to avenge Gordon and bring the region firmly under British control.

The Sudanese campaign of 1896-98 was a daunting test for a relatively inexperienced field commander. Hostile terrain, distance and the financial constraints imposed by the Egyptian authorities presented significant difficulties. However, with his



Kitchener's use of overwhelming force proved decisive at Atbara – the captured emir shown here being brought before Kitchener – and even more so at Omdurman
GODFREY GILES (ARTIST)/NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM


British Maxim machine guns being prepared for action at Omdurman CHRONICLE/ALAMY


British troops met with the forceful objections of a Boer woman as they burn a farmstead and intern the family PRINT COLLECTOR/ALAMY

engineering background, Kitchener proved equal to the logistical demands of moving and supplying an army in an inhospitable desert region.

In the first phase of the campaign, which lasted six months, the objective was to seize Dongola, capital of the most northerly province. To save resources, Kitchener had a disused railway rebuilt by recovering old sleepers that had been used for other purposes. Twelve miles of line had to be patiently restored after it was washed away in a flash flood. In face of overwhelming force, the Dervishes, as the British termed the Mahdists, abandoned Dongola and retreated into the desert.

The fall of Dongola was a preliminary to the push towards Khartoum. The 'River War' – the name from the title of a book by the young Winston Churchill, who took part in the expedition – entailed a series of advances along the Nile.

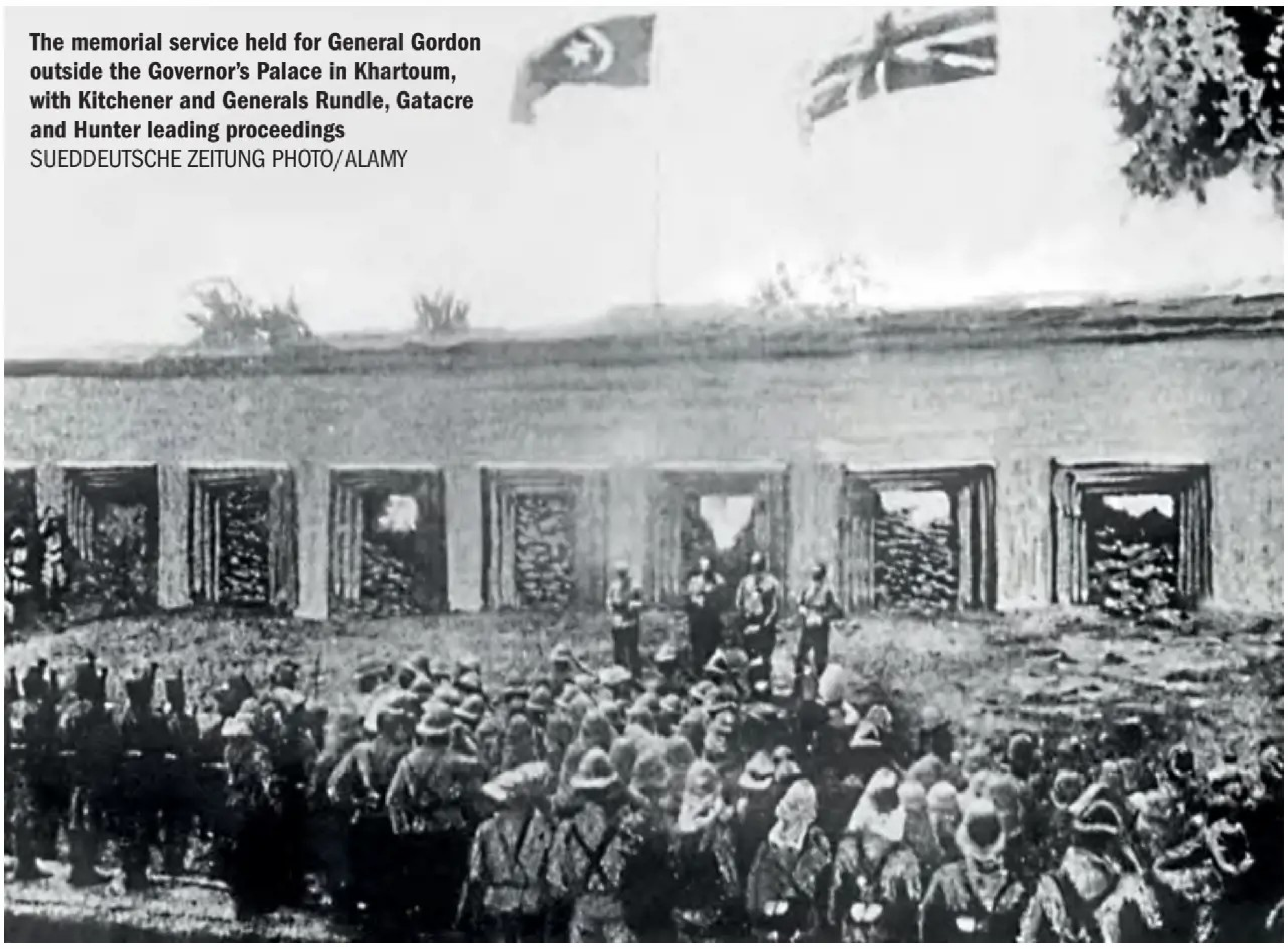
Much of the river was navigable only when the water level was high, during the late summer. At the beginning of 1897, the army set about constructing a 230-mile railway across the Nubian Desert, which drastically shortened the distance to Khartoum and bypassed three challenging Nile cataracts.

Kitchener personally supervised the work, which was carried out by an 8,000-strong labour force of Egyptian troops and convicts. The engineering mastermind was a talented young Canadian, Percy Girouard, handpicked by Kitchener. Rolling stock had to be sourced from the imperial entrepreneur Cecil Rhodes, who diverted locomotives destined for South Africa. Construction was harassed by Mahdist forces based in Abu Hamad, but the base fell in August.

The railway was extended south, enabling the advancing army to receive reinforcements and supplies. By February 1898, an Anglo-Egyptian-Sudanese force 14,000-strong was massed at Berber, less than 200 miles from the Dervish stronghold at Omdurman. With the river gunboats supplying mobile artillery, it seemed unlikely the expedition could fail. But to get this far had required immense effort and confirmed Kitchener's reputation as a remorseless taskmaster.

War where two rivers meet

In face of this threat, the Khalifa's forces dug in behind a zariba (fortified stockade)


The memorial service held for General Gordon outside the Governor's Palace in Khartoum, with Kitchener and Generals Rundle, Gatacre and Hunter leading proceedings
SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO/ALAMY

Horatio Kitchener (seated) with his elder brother, Henry
EDWIN GREW

Kitchener with British and Boer commanders at the peace conference ending the Second Boer War EDWIN GREW

near the confluence of the Nile and its Atbara tributary. Deciding not to wait for the Dervish army and their camp followers to succumb to starvation, on Good Friday, Kitchener launched a ferocious frontal assault. His advantage in heavy guns proved decisive. For a loss of just 80 men, with 500 wounded, Kitchener's forces inflicted 3,000 casualties and took 2,000 prisoners. Among them was the Mahdist commander, Emir Mahmoud, who was led in triumph by the victorious army – though contrary to some later accounts, he was not lashed.

It is also worth noting that having lived under the Mahdists' oppressive rule, Sudanese civilians generally welcomed their downfall.

The mechanised slaughter at Atbara was a template for the decisive clash on the plain before Omdurman at the beginning of September 1898. Kitchener had assembled 25,000 troops, supported by Arab irregulars, and with the Nile in flood, was able to bring his gunboats and transport steamers into play.

Although the Dervishes outnumbered Kitchener's forces by two to one, they were decisively outclassed in terms of weaponry. The day before the main engagement, thousands of Dervishes advanced across open ground. After they came to a halt, British artillery rained devastating fire on their base behind them. When a second Mahdist wave began its assault the following morning, the expeditionary force responded with withering fire from its artillery, Maxim and Nordenfelt machine guns and bolt-action rifles.

The result could not be in doubt – although Kitchener's forces took some losses before final victory was gained. The Mahdists came within range of the Nile gunboats as they pursued retreating British cavalry on the right wing of the expeditionary force, but the most celebrated episode of the battle, a charge by the 21st Lancers – whose number included Churchill – almost came unstuck when Mahdists sprang an ambush from a dry watercourse.

THE BROTHERS THREE

Horatio Kitchener was the second of four brothers, three of whom had military careers. Horatio was an ambitious officer who cut his teeth on Imperial campaigns before rising to the army's highest rank and joining the War Cabinet. In 1902, he became 1st Viscount of Khartoum and, in 1914, was raised to 1st Earl of Khartoum and of Broome.

On Horatio's death, the earldom passed to his older brother, Henry. Born in October 1846, Henry grew up in Ireland and joined the British Army in 1866, serving in the 46th (South Devonshire) Regiment and the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. During the Franco-Prussian War, Henry (with Horatio) served in a volunteer ambulance unit in the French Army, before he became garrison instructor at Curragh Camp in Ireland. He was appointed as an instructor at the Royal Military College in 1879, a post he held for seven years. In 1891, as chief transport officer of the field forces deployed on the Manipur Expedition, Henry saw action in Burma. He was later appointed deputy assistant adjutant general in Jamaica before receiving his posting as depot commander for the West India Regiment. Henry retired in 1903 as a colonel but in 1914 was recalled and posted to South West Africa, later leading a force sent to fight the Germans in East Africa.

The youngest brother, Walter, was born in May 1858. He joined the army in 1876 and served as a transport officer with the Kabul Field Force during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, seeing action at the First Battle of Charasiah, the Battle of Karez Meer, and in the Chardeh Valley. By November 1896, Water had been promoted to lieutenant-colonel. During the Mahdist War in Sudan, he served as director of transport, later leading the Kordofan force and participating in the Battle of Omdurman. After Khartoum's capture, Walter became the city's military governor.

In 1899, Walter was on the staff of Sir Redvers Buller, commander of British forces in the initial months of the Second Boer War and took part in attempts to relieve Ladysmith. Reputedly, he was expecting higher command but was passed over by his brother to curtail allegations of nepotism. Nevertheless, Walter did command troops in the Transvaal. He was knighted in October 1902 and that November posted to India as commander of the Lahore Division. Later, he became the Governor and military commander of Bermuda, a fortress colony with a disproportionately large garrison. He died as a lieutenant-general following medical complications in 1912.

It is conjecture, but had he lived, Sir Walter – as an established general – would been entrusted with divisional/corps command or served in an administrative role. With the weight of his voice added to his elder brother's, it is possible the Kitchener family's influence on the conduct of Britain's war may have been greater.

The Kitchener earldom became extinct in 2011, as although Henry's son (also Henry, a naval officer) predeceased him, his grandson (also Henry, an army officer) succeeded him. As the 3rd Earl died childless, his brother Charles died in 1982, and Sir Walter's son (another Henry, an RAF officer) died in 1984, there was no male heir to inherit the peerage. Interestingly, in 2012, though unable to inherit, Emma Kitchener-Fellowes (the 3rd Earl's niece and wife of film producer Julian Fellowes) was granted the same rank and style as the daughter of an earl by Royal Warrant – as would have been due if her father had survived his brother and succeeded to the earldom.

Sir Walter Kitchener was a British general and Horatio Kitchener's younger brother PRINT COLLECTOR/ALAMY

Kitchener hosted King George V (stood next to him) and Queen Mary of Teck on their 1911 visit to Cairo. Note Kitchener's towering height UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

Mounted policemen keep order as masses of men 'storm' a Whitehall recruiting office, eager to enlist ALAMY

> ***"Although the Dervishes outnumbered the Kitchener by two to one, they were decisively outclassed... When a Mahdist wave began its assault, the expeditionary force responded with withering fire"***

However, by the end of the day Kitchener had taken control of Omdurman, followed soon after by Khartoum – a few miles away on the opposite side of the river, at the point where the White Nile and Blue Mile meet. His forces had taken just 500 casualties but the Mahdists had lost 20,000 killed and wounded, with another 5,000 taken prisoner.

Flashpoint at Fashoda

In the aftermath, Kitchener ordered the destruction of the Mahdi's tomb, the most prominent structure in Omdurman, on the grounds that it might become a rallying point for fanatical opposition. This may have been understandable – even justifiable – but his decision to exhume and behead the Mahdi's body was of a different order. He had the body thrown into the Nile and was reported to be keeping the skull to use as an ink well or drinking cup. It was later buried in secret, but Kitchener would have done better to treat the remains with more respect. The unnecessary brutality earned him widespread criticism, including from Queen Victoria.

Kitchener on his preferred charger, Democrat EDWIN GREW

Omdurman settled Sudan's future, but two weeks later, Kitchener was despatched to meet the French representative, Colonel Marchand, in southern Sudan. The 'Fashoda incident' revealed an unsuspected gift for diplomacy on Kitchener's part.

Marchand's small expedition had set out from Brazzaville in a borrowed steamer to secure the Fashoda area and develop a French protectorate in the Sudan. The full scope of French ambition was to establish a continuous string of colonies, protectorates and friendly states stretching west to east from Dakar to Djibouti. This was in direct competition to the British effort to do the same, but south to north from the Cape to Cairo.

The competing expansions met in Sudan. Steaming up the Ubangi River, Marchand marched overland through jungle scrubland and into the Sudanese desert to reach the Nile after 14 months. The intention was that partnering French expeditions, travelling west via Ethiopia and Djibouti, would meet him, but neither arrived. Instead, Marchand found Kitchener, moving upriver with orders to confront him.

Make no mistake, while the meeting of the French expedition with Kitchener's much larger blocking force was calm and cordial, the ramifications of the encounter were serious. Tensions between the countries briefly rose to dangerous levels, to the extent that the Royal Navy mobilised its reserves and war between the two premier superpowers seemed a reasonable possibility. In the end France withdrew its claim to the territory. As an aside, the term 'Fashoda syndrome' emerged to describe the French political tendency to assert influence in areas of Africa that might be becoming susceptible to British influences.

Kitchener's success earned him the gratitude of the British establishment, signalled by his appointment as Governor-General of the Sudan and elevation to the House of Lords. It took another year before the Khalifa was run to ground and killed. But by then, Kitchener was on his way to a different theatre.

Forging a reputation

War had once again broken out with the Boers in October 1899, the first two months of the conflict proving disastrous for the British. In an urgent bid to reverse the situation, Kitchener was sent to Cape Town as chief of staff to the new British commander, the legendary Lord Roberts. In the absence of a modern staff structure, Kitchener acted as more than a mere executive whose role was to translate his commander's instructions into operational plans. It was also understood that he would take over if Roberts was incapacitated.

In the opening months of 1900, the priority for British forces was to lift the siege of the diamond-mining town of Kimberley and move east to take the Boer capitals of Bloemfontein and Pretoria. With Roberts struck down by illness, Kitchener took charge in the opening stages of what turned out to be the war's last large-scale conventional battle, at Paardeberg. Here, in mid-February, he caught up with General Piet Cronje's 7,000-strong force, which was retreating towards the Orange Free State. Moving slowly with Boer fighters' families travelling in ox wagons, a heavily

Men of the 16th Manchesters march past Kitchener at Manchester Town Hall
MIRRORPIX/ALAMY

PALATINE ARTILLERY

outnumbered Cronje decided to dig in on the banks of the Modder River.

The ensuing ten-day battle was not Kitchener's finest hour. Seeking a decisive victory, he followed up an initial artillery bombardment with an infantry advance. Unlike his poorly armed Sudanese opponents two years earlier, the Boers were equipped with Mauser rifles, with which they decimated the oncoming British. Kitchener's force suffered 1,300 casualties in 24 hours for the loss of just 300 Boers. Ultimately, isolation, sickness and exhaustion, combined with relentless fire from howitzers and quick-firing 1-pounder pom-poms forced Cronje to surrender. By then Roberts had recovered enough, and Kitchener had moved on to prepare for the advance into the Orange Free State.

The most controversial phase of Kitchener's stint in South Africa was yet to come. By October 1900, the Boer capitals had fallen, and the two states had been annexed. Roberts handed command to his chief of staff and left for home, mistakenly believing all that was required now was a limited police action. In fact, the war dragged on for another 18 months, with Boer kommandos waging a guerrilla war, the mounted volunteer militias living off the land and carrying out hit and run attacks and ambushes.

Kitchener's response showed him at his most ruthless, although the methods associated with him were really an extension of those first adopted by Roberts. To deprive the Boer fighters of support and staging posts, British forces burnt farms and drove Boer families into concentration camps. Humanitarians like the welfare campaigner Emily Hobhouse condemned the poor and worsening conditions in the overcrowded camps. Poor diet, disease and lack of sanitation caused the deaths of some 27,000 people, mostly women and children.

While the situation in the camps owed more to neglect than to policy, Kitchener was nevertheless unrepentant, referring to Hobhouse as 'that bloody woman', and intensifying his efforts to cut off aid to the roving Boers. "Every farm," he wrote, "is an intelligence agency and a supply depot so that it is almost impossible to surround or catch the enemy." Armoured trains patrolled open spaces, and a network of fortified blockhouses – linked by barbed wire – was constructed across the veld. The aim was to protect supply lines and divide the land into sections, so it was easier for mounted units to track down the elusive kommandos.

So how effective was Kitchener's strategy? Anger at wide-scale farm burning, reinforced by the defiant spirit of the Boer women, arguably stiffened the fighters' determination to continue striking at the hated occupier. In the long run, however, as supplies became scarce, Boer resistance began to dwindle, and attrition succeeded in the end – albeit at a heavy cost.

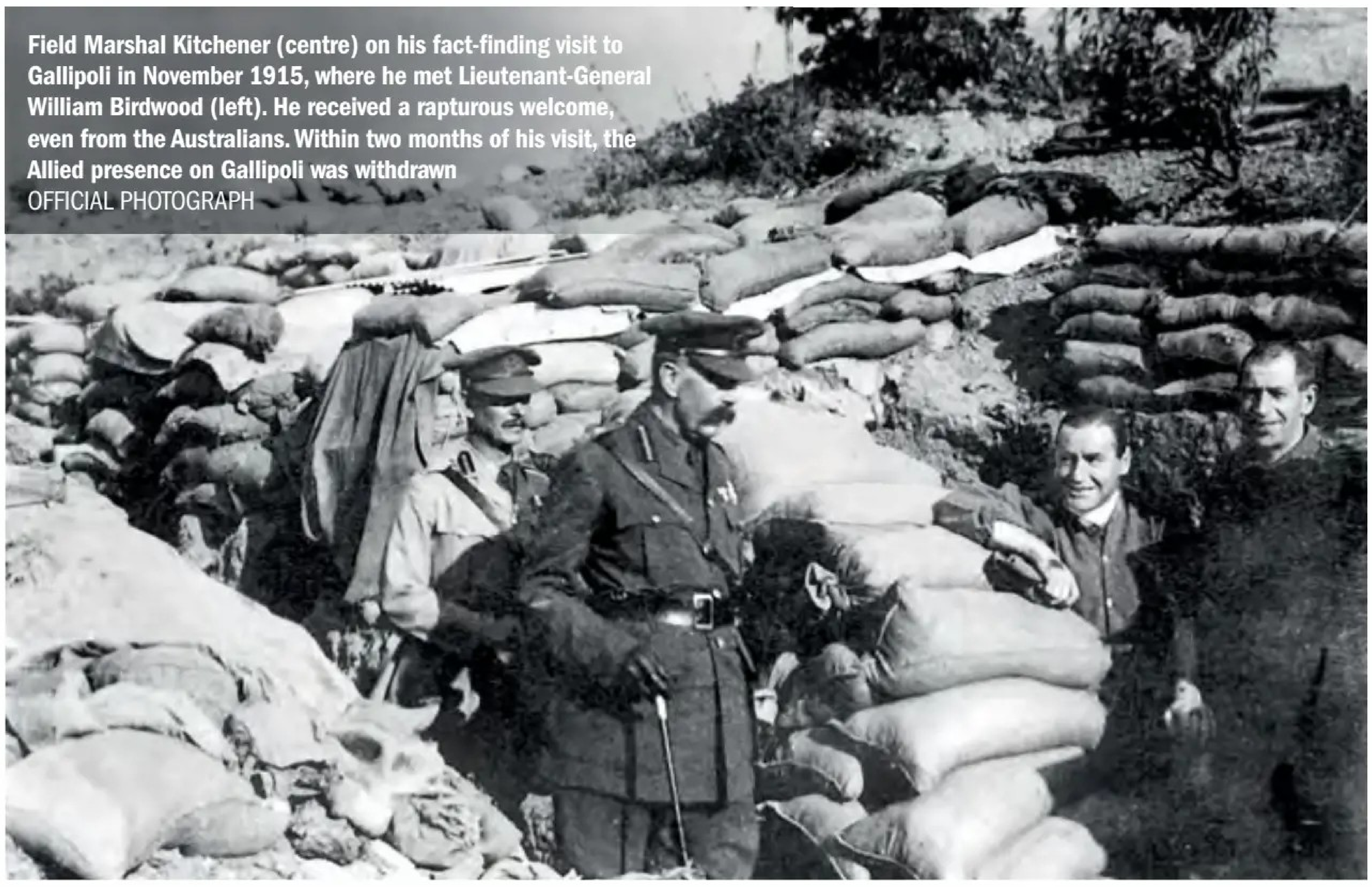
> *"Paardeberg was not Kitchener's finest hour... but most controversial phase of Kitchener's stint in South Africa was yet to come and showed him at his most ruthless"*

In the ensuing peace talks, Kitchener proved unexpectedly conciliatory, persuading Boer representatives that the prospect of self-government within the British Empire would be an honourable outcome. The war came to an end with the Peace of Vereeniging in May 1902, after which Kitchener returned home to a rapturous welcome.

From colonial conflict to world war

The next decade was anti-climactic for a man of Kitchener's restless ambition. He spent seven years as commander-in-chief in India, seeking from his arrival to reorganise the Indian army to meet any potential external threat. A dispute with Viceroy Lord Curzon over political control of the army administration led to the latter's resignation in August 1905. Whatever the merits of the case, the episode confirmed an impression of Kitchener as a power-seeking intriguer who would stop at nothing to get his own way. This may have played a part in the Liberal government's decision to turn him down for the post of viceroy when his term as India C-in-C ended.

Instead, Kitchener was promoted to field marshal, later purchasing Broome Park, a country house in Kent, in preparation for his retirement. But he was strangely unfulfilled. He could not understand why



Field Marshal Kitchener (centre) on his fact-finding visit to Gallipoli in November 1915, where he met Lieutenant-General William Birdwood (left). He received a rapturous welcome, even from the Australians. Within two months of his visit, the Allied presence on Gallipoli was withdrawn
OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH

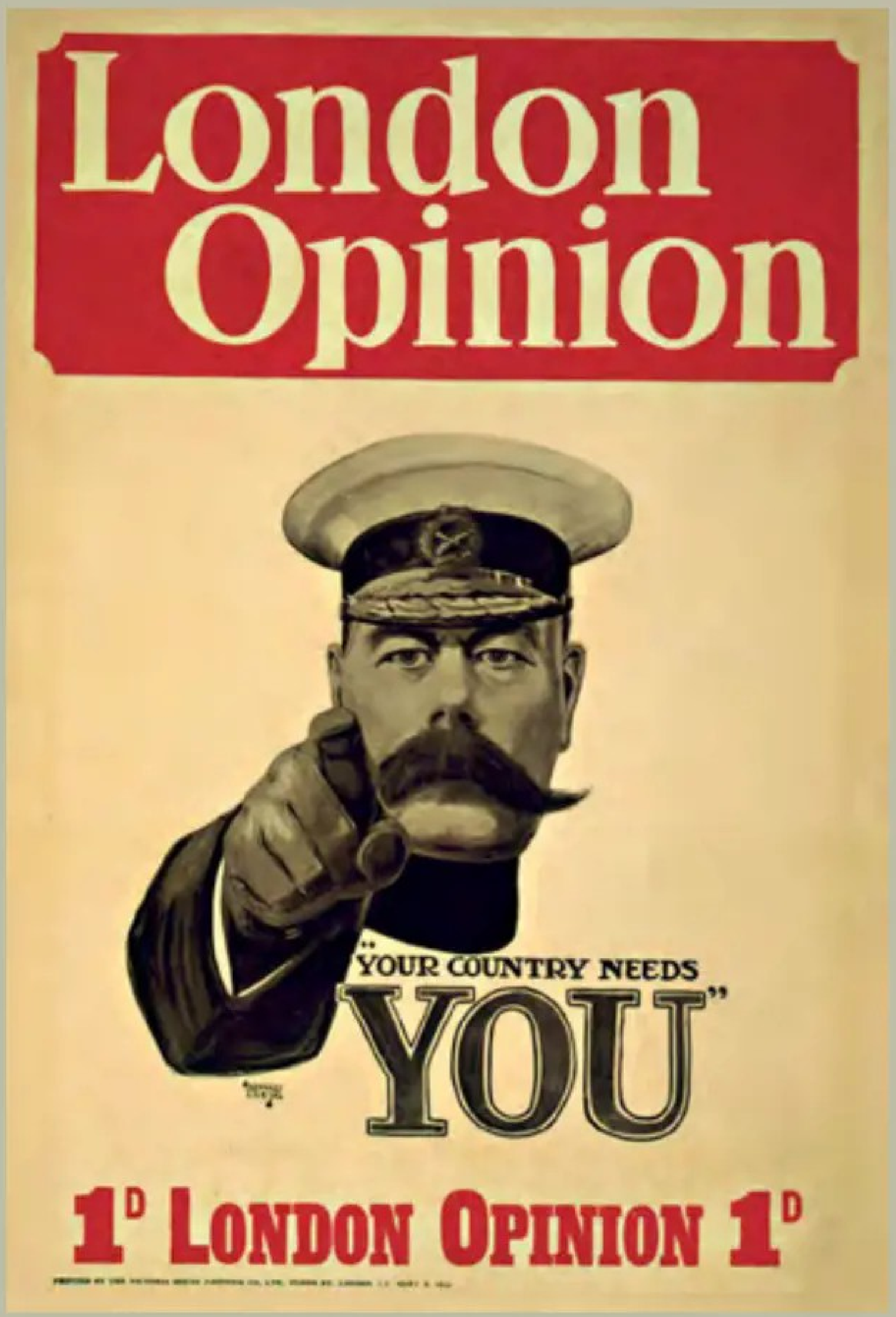
LORD KITCHENER WANTS YOU!

A likeness of Kitchener was used to create wartime recruitment posters, and *Lord Kitchener wants you*, and the derivative *Your country needs you*, are icons of World War One and among its most enduring images – indeed, today it is still occasionally known simply as "*the* Poster".

The premise was replicated numerous times by the British using alternative versions of Kitchener, John Bull and the MP John Redmond, as well as by the United States to inspire recruitment, plus in Canada to sell Victory Bonds. So influential were perceptions of the poster that examples appeared in Japan, Hungary, Spain, Armenia, Brazil, Slovenia, the Soviet Union and even Germany, meaning the range of likenesses featured became extremely varied and include 'Uncle Sam', a Roman centurion and even Smokey Bear of US Forest Service fame.

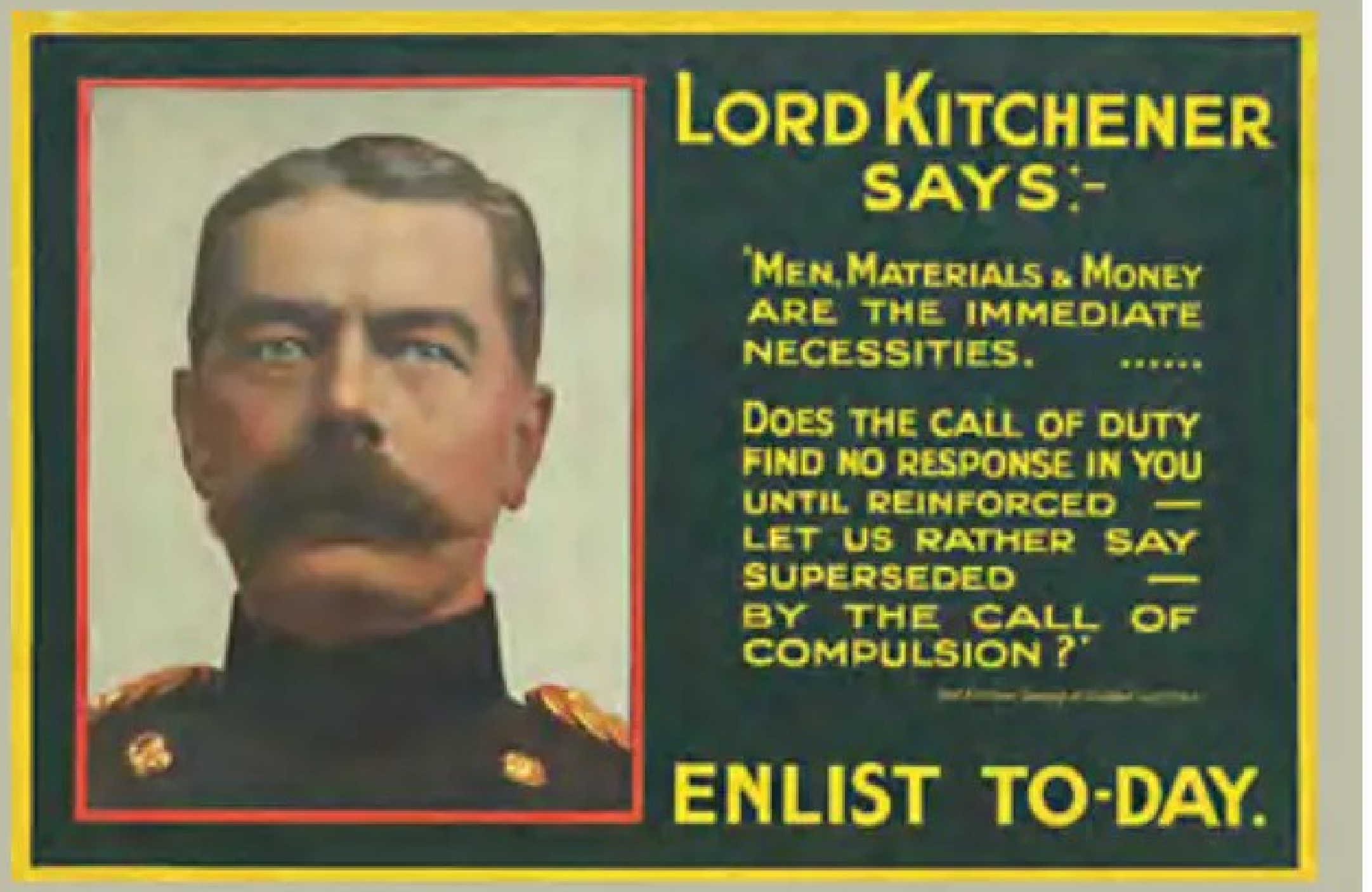
It seems any organisation or institution seeking to call prospective participants into action have used the poster – even Wikipedia, which replicated both the Lord Kitchener and Uncle Sam types.

Designed in 1914 by Alfred Leete of the Caxton Advertising Agency for the front cover of the September 5 issue of *London Opinion*, the illustration proved popular with requests for reproductions lodged and postcard-sized copies made. Leete based his design on the original Eric Field-designed *Your King and country need you: Enlist now*, poster, which features the text on top of a Union flag for a full-page advert in the *Daily Mail/Daily Mirror*.



The famous front cover of the September 5, 1914, edition of the *London Opinion* US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

It is a fact that for long after the world wars, British military figures were among the celebrities of their day – a phenomenon that has only waned in recent decades. Likened to a modern celebrity 'endorsement', Leete's illustration included feedback from Kitchener, and according to historian Dr Jane Tynan, Kitchener was the natural pick due to him being a "figure of absolute will and power, an emblem of British masculinity", embracing both Victorian styles and Edwardian military ethos. Similarly, the Imperial War Museum notes that Kitchener was synonymous with victory as "the only soldier with a great war name, [who had] won in the field, within the memory of the thousands of men the country wanted". It is worth noting too that Kitchener's name does not appear – it was not needed; he was famous enough.


LORD KITCHENER
SAYS:-
'MEN, MATERIALS & MONEY ARE THE IMMEDIATE NECESSITIES. ......
DOES THE CALL OF DUTY FIND NO RESPONSE IN YOU UNTIL REINFORCED — LET US RATHER SAY SUPERSEDED — BY THE CALL OF COMPULSION?'
ENLIST TO-DAY.

The more common 30-word recruitment device featuring Kitchener, which had ten times the print run of '*the* Poster' PARLIAMENTARY RECRUITING COMMITTEE

While historians note that posters such as the Leete's contributed to more than a million men volunteering for service, and enlistment volumes peaked with the publishing of his design, modern research has, however, called in question the significance of the famous poster, suggesting it met its peak popularity and reach in more recent times. There is limited evidence showing public display of the pointing finger, and it had a much smaller print-run than another poster, featuring a less dramatic image of Kitchener, accompanied by an uninspiring 30-word quotation from one of his speeches. Indeed, just four original examples of '*the* Poster' are thought to survive today.

the methods he had used to pacify the Boers disqualified him from being awarded a Nobel peace prize (established in 1901). In June 1911 he returned to Egypt as British Agent and Consul-General.

It was while he was on leave in summer 1914 that Britain went to war with Germany, and Kitchener found himself playing the best-known role of his career. Recalled to London, he was invited to join the Cabinet as Secretary of State for War. It was made clear that Kitchener was entering Asquith's government as a non-party individual at a moment of crisis.

It was a powerful position, but Kitchener did not have unquestioned authority over British strategy. Dismissing the widespread and optimistic assumption that it would be a short war, he surprised his colleagues by stating that it would take three years and a million men to win. He also advised against concentrating the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) close to the Franco-Belgian border, instead favouring Amiens, 70 miles southeast, where it was less likely to be encircled by the Germans, but Asquith backed the BEF's commander, Field Marshal Sir John French, against his War Secretary.

Kitchener's great wartime achievement was his organisation of the volunteer 'New Armies' for service on the continent. When he took over, the army's full strength was about 230,000 – half of whom were stationed across the Empire. The recruitment drive he spearheaded was remarkably successful, bringing almost 2.5 million men to the colours and training them for action by 1916.

Finding his feet again

In spring 1915, as the deadlock on the Western Front solidified, Kitchener became involved in two developments that showed him at his least effective.

The first was the ill-fated bid to force a passage through the Dardanelles via the Gallipoli Peninsula, in the hope of eliminating the Ottoman Empire, taking pressure off the struggling Russians, and finding an alternative to the ongoing slaughter in Flanders. Kitchener was sceptical about the concept and insisted on it being a purely naval operation, but gave way to pressure from Cabinet colleagues and agreed to divert the British 29th Division to take part in the bloody landings at Gallipoli.

However, Kitchener was harmed more directly by the problems of supply, which resulted in an acute shortage of shells. A savage press campaign, culminating in the May 1915 *Daily Mail* headline: "The shell scandal: Lord Kitchener's tragic blunder", damaged his reputation for competence. The result was a crisis that left Kitchener at the War Office but stripped of his responsibility for arms production. This was transferred to a newly created Ministry of Munitions headed by David Lloyd George. From December 1915 matters of military strategy became the province of Sir William Robertson as Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

Kitchener was not a natural Cabinet member and often appeared at the mercy of events. On the controversial issue of introducing compulsory military service, he was content to follow Asquith's gradualist approach, which the government maintained until January 1916. Meanwhile, with the important exception of the Prime Minister, he failed to build constructive relations. Unsurprisingly, in view of his military background, he was used to command and control rather than debate and compromise.

The protected cruiser HMS *Hampshire*, on which Kitchener met his end CHRONICLE/ALAMY

Additionally, Kitchener was a poor communicator whose secretive methods won him few friends, and he remained ignorant of the nuances of domestic politics – although even his greatest critic, Lloyd George, acknowledged his willingness to learn. As an unbending high Church Anglican, for example, he initially failed to grasp the importance of appointing nonconformist army chaplains. But when overruled, he had the humility to take advice on getting the names of the various denominations right.

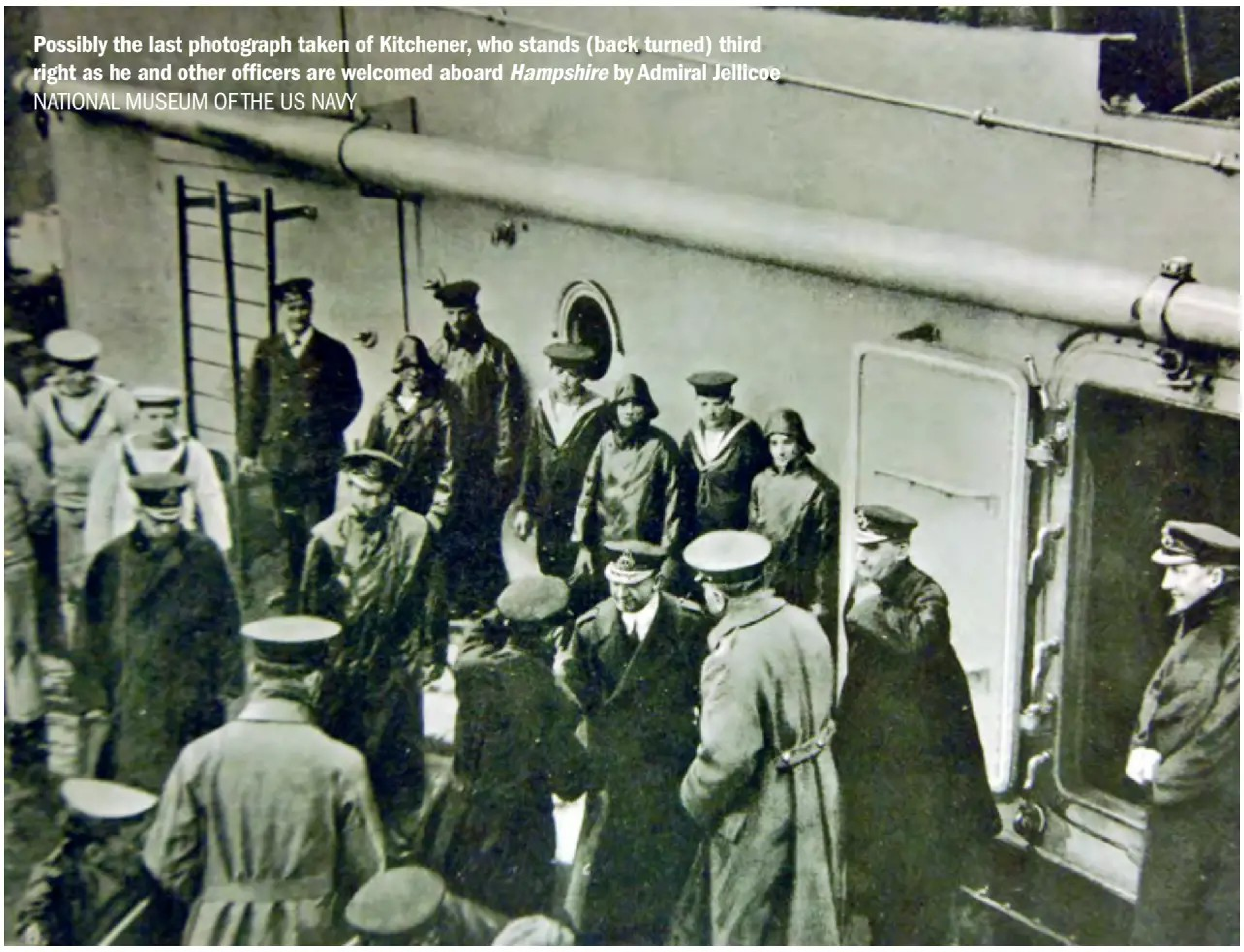
In June 1916, with the Russian war effort faltering, Kitchener accepted an invitation to visit Britain's beleaguered ally on a fact-finding mission – it may be that exasperated ministers had promoted the trip to sideline a difficult colleague. The journey was to be undertaken in the cruiser HMS *Hampshire*. Setting off in a tremendous gale, the ship hit a German mine off the Orkneys and went down with just 12 survivors. Among the dead was Kitchener, last seen on deck stoically awaiting the end. He became the highest-ranking British officer killed during World War One.

Amid the outpouring of national grief at his death, wild rumours spread. Some even believed that, like King Arthur, he had been spirited away and lay somewhere in an enchanted sleep.

Less edifying were stories that the ship had been sabotaged by a 'hidden hand', belonging to internal traitors, German spies, Irish nationalists or Russian communist agents. It was alleged British troops had prevented Orkney islanders from launching rescue boats – which in any case would have been a futile gesture in such heavy seas. Since the 1980s, diving expeditions have conclusively disproved claims *Hampshire* was sunk by an onboard bomb. The myths surrounding Kitchener's death have been laid to rest.

Kitchener died midway through World War One, less than a month before the onset of the great bloodletting on the Somme. Had he lived, it seems doubtful he could have significantly changed the course of the conflict, which had already become a trial of strength between vast military-industrial complexes. Given his magnanimity towards the defeated Boers, however, he might have used his influence in favour of a more generous peace at the Paris conference in 1919.

Most heroes are flawed, and Horatio Kitchener was no exception. As a field commander he relied on overwhelming force rather than tactical finesse. He was secretive and difficult to work with; he could be overbearing and vindictive. But both in the Sudan and South Africa, he combined a gift for improvisation with a determination to see the task through to the end. In 1914, almost alone, he appreciated that salvation rested on an unprecedented expansion of the army and the husbanding of its resources for a protracted war. In all three great crises of his career, he was the best available man for the job.



Possibly the last photograph taken of Kitchener, who stands (back turned) third right as he and other officers are welcomed aboard *Hampshire* by Admiral Jellicoe NATIONAL MUSEUM OF THE US NAVY

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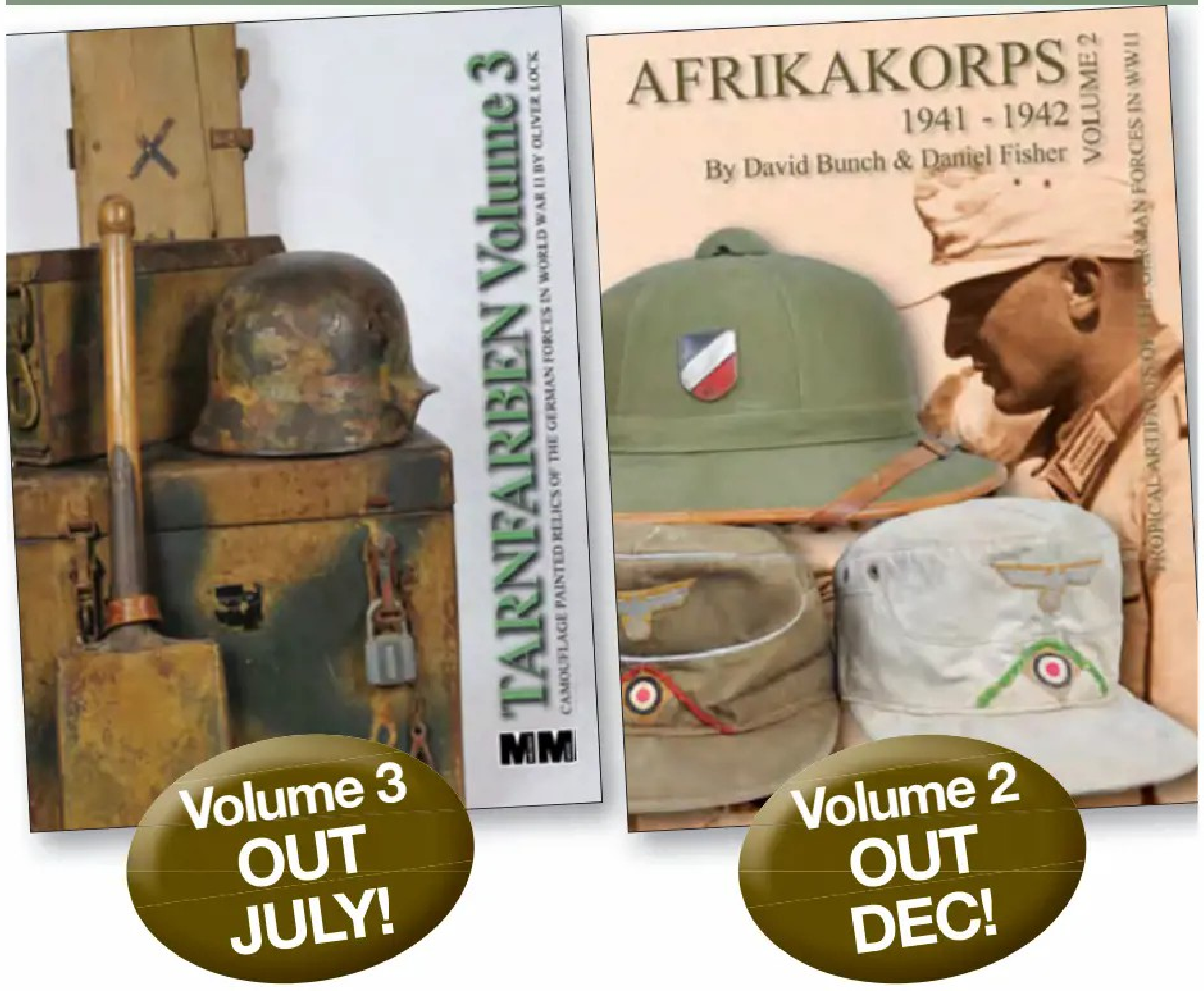
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GERMAN GIANT

In 1945, the British inherited a unique super-heavy tank hull and brought it home for evaluation. Craig Moore delves into the archives to discover what they learned

On April 3, 1945, during the US Army's XIX Corps advance on Paderborn, the 751st Field Artillery Battalion entered Haustenbeck Henschel tank proving ground, near Sennelager. They found one of Germany's largest proving grounds almost untouched by the war.

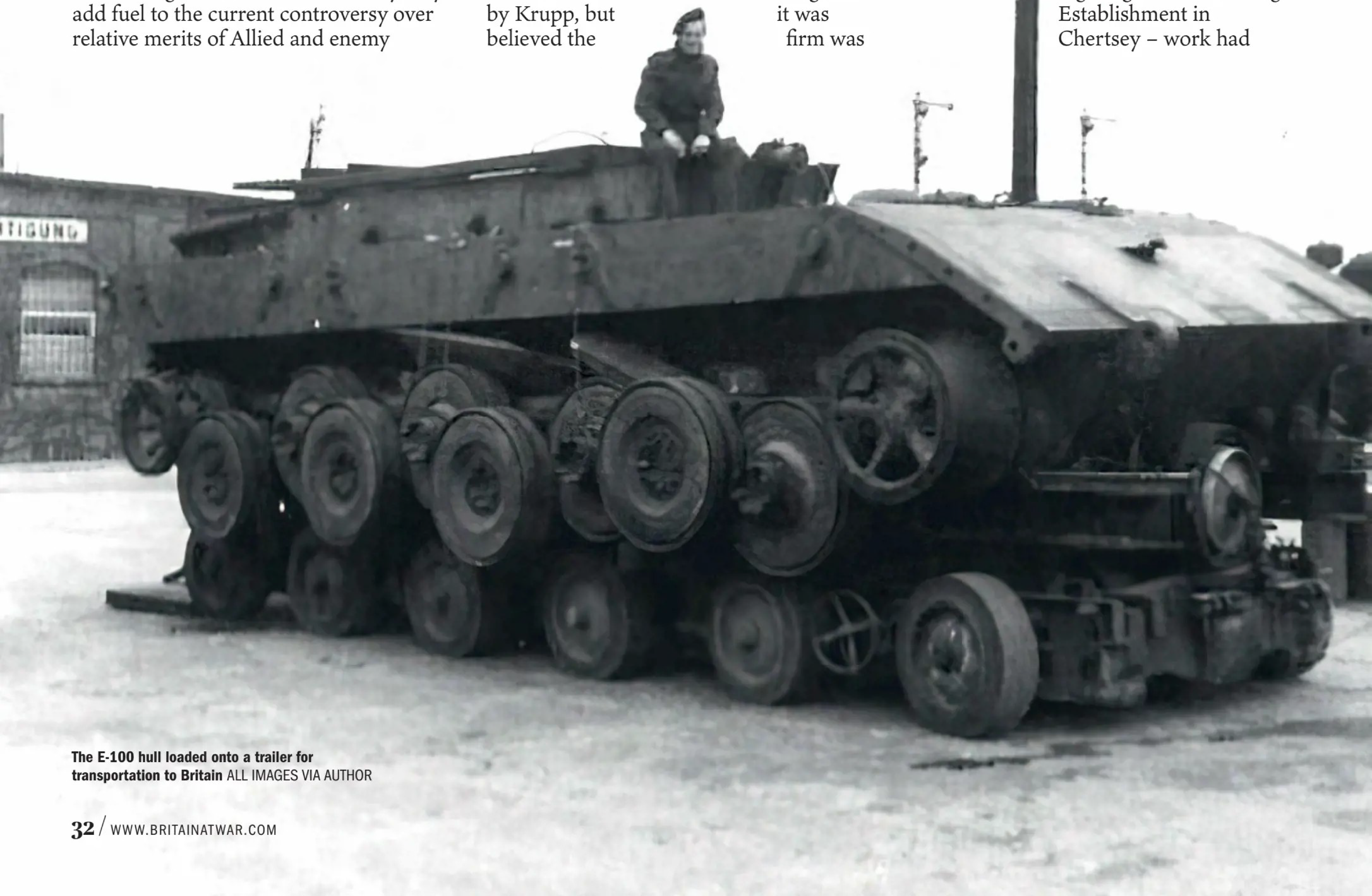
In addition to being a convenient place to process refugees and former POWs from Stalag 326, the Americans cleared the workshops to discover the sole example of a Grille 17 self-propelled gun and an experimental Tiger – and another behemoth among those weighty residents. Associated Press war reporter Wes Gallagher wrote: "Its discovery may add fuel to the current controversy over relative merits of Allied and enemy tanks", describing what he termed the "Super Tiger". After the surrender of Germany, Sennelager fell within the British occupation zone, and it was left to British technicians to evaluate the German giant.

Into the mind of an engineer

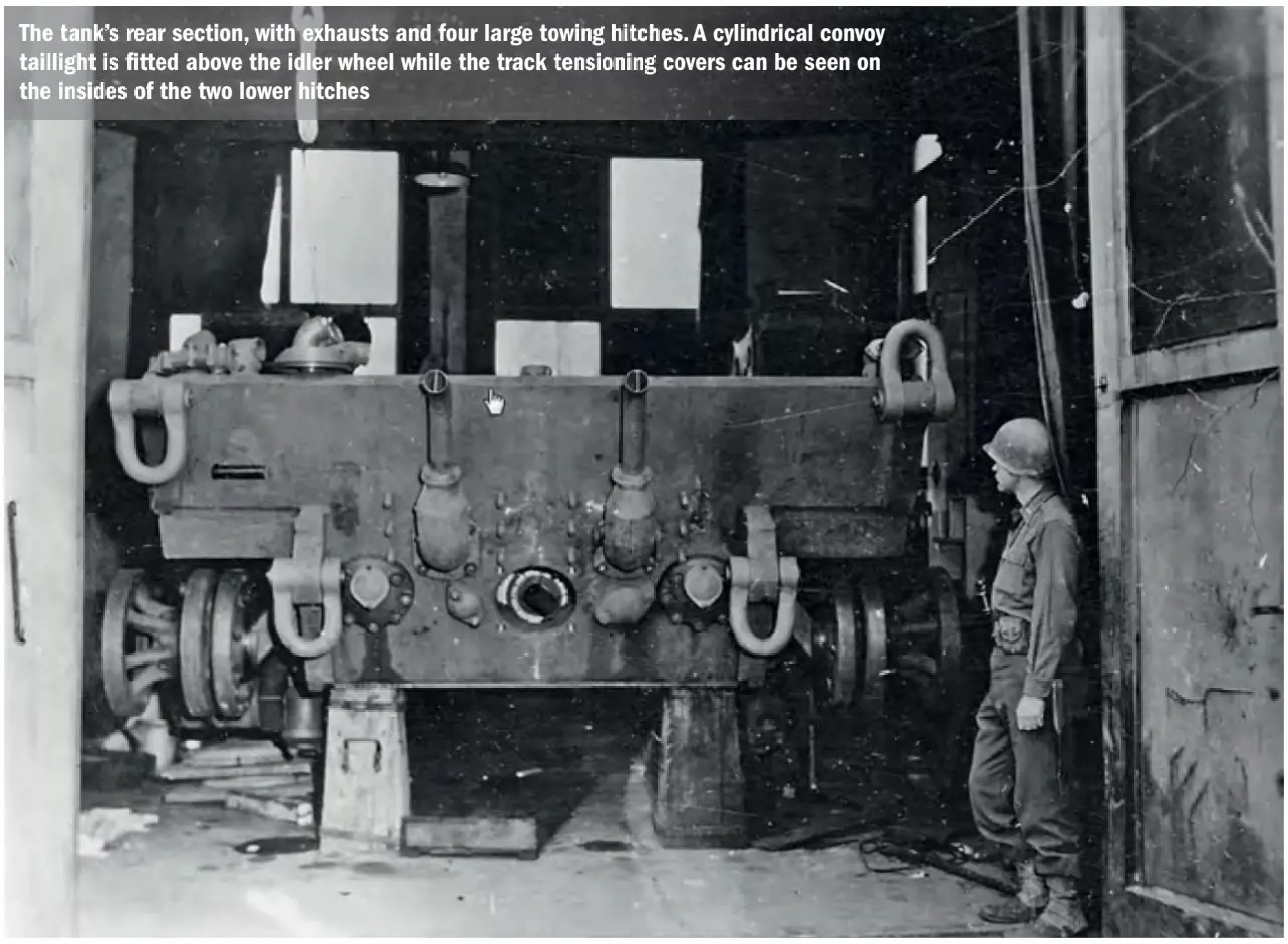
Gallagher's Super Tiger was in fact the E-100, both the largest of the Entwicklung-series designs and believed to be the sole example built. The E-series was aimed at enhancing German armoured vehicle production by standardising on simpler, more cost-effective designs, developing common hulls and sharing components wherever possible.

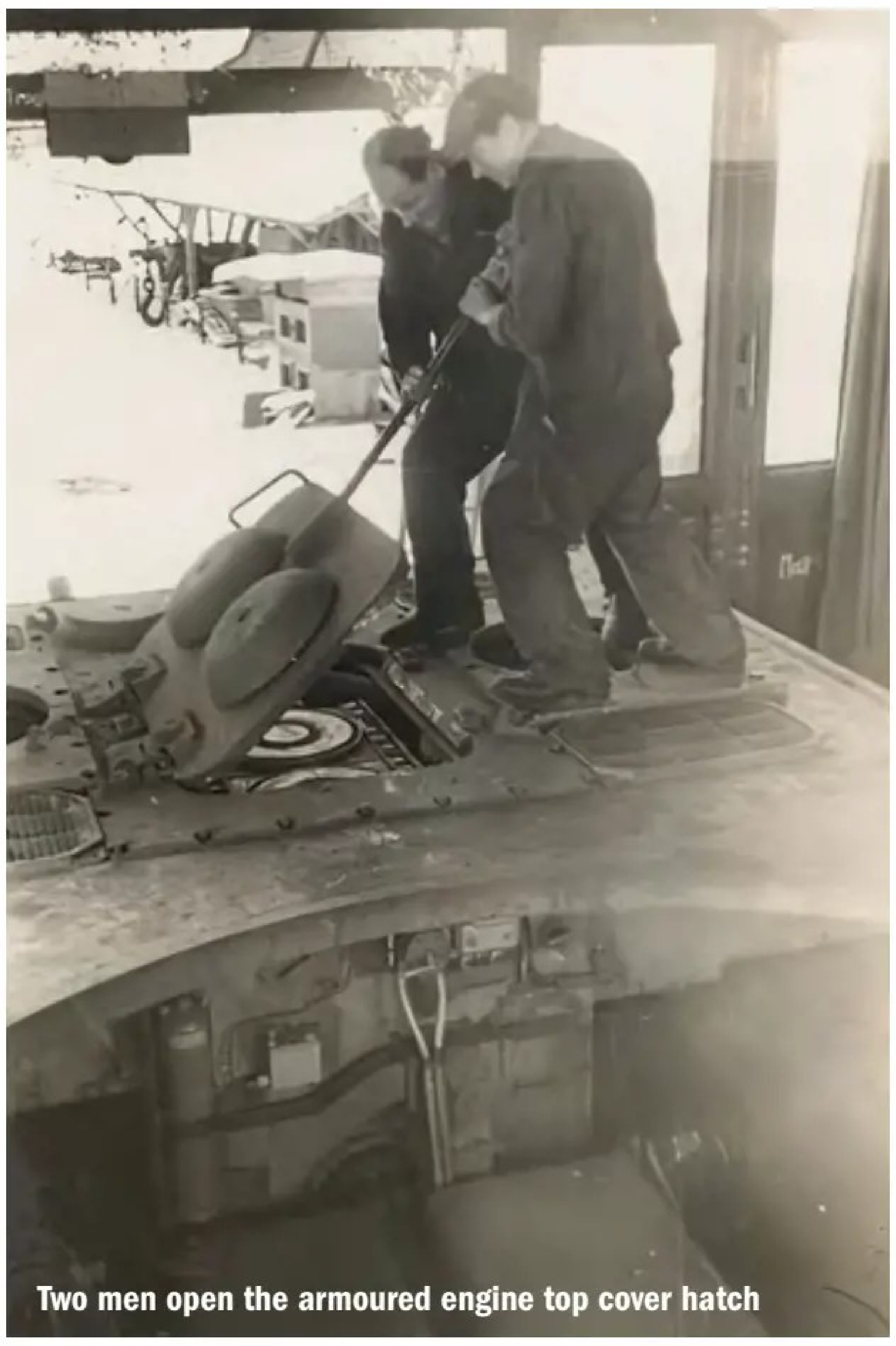
The E-100 hull was designed by Krupp, but it was believed the firm was overburdened and so the job of constructing the prototype was given to Adler. On June 30, 1943, Adler's engineers began work to finish the design and component parts. The hull was assembled in a Haustenbeck Henschel workshop barely large enough to accommodate the huge machine.

The British inherited the E-100's partially assembled hull which was transported for evaluation at the Fighting Vehicle Proving Establishment in Chertsey – work had



The E-100 hull loaded onto a trailer for transportation to Britain ALL IMAGES VIA AUTHOR


The tank's rear section, with exhausts and four large towing hitches. A cylindrical convoy taillight is fitted above the idler wheel while the track tensioning covers can be seen on the insides of the two lower hitches


Two men open the armoured engine top cover hatch

"Its discovery may add fuel to the current controversy over relative merits of Allied and enemy tanks"

not started on the turret. It was not only the hull that landed in Britain's lap, as it gained access to German general and engineer Heinrich Ernst Kniepkamp, who had been long involved in armoured vehicle development. Kniepkamp is credited with the Sd.Kfz 2 Kettenkrad halftrack motorcycle and was engaged with the development of several major types. Notably, he was active in the E-series proposals and later adapted some of those concepts as part of the post-war teams developing the German Leopard I and Swiss Panzer 61.

The British interviewed Kniepkamp on August 31, 1945, and he was asked about the design of the E-series tanks as well as their general design considerations: "The reasons were: (1) That to achieve a very strong front plate all possible weight had to be moved to the rear of the tank. (2) Unit motor and power train was desired because of the simplified manufacturing and service. (3) It was planned, by using two types of engines and power train, to produce four vehicles. (4) All suspension [units] should be attached from the outside and no fighting space should be encumbered by through torsion rods. (5) In case the front idler or any of the bogie wheels were destroyed by mines, the vehicle must be capable of proceeding by adjusting the track around the remaining road wheels."

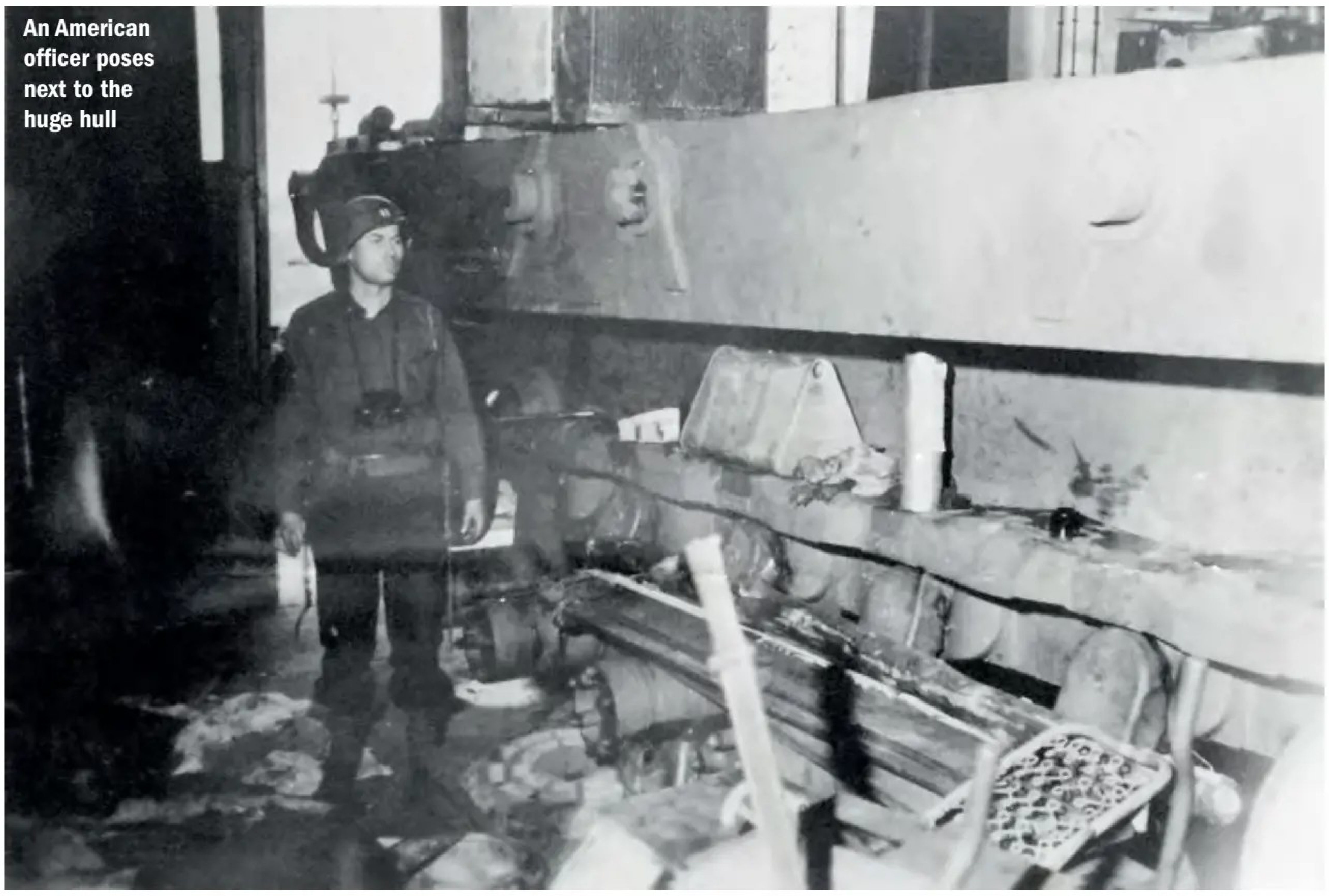
"The four vehicles were as follows: E-10 weighing from 12-15 tons, E-25 weighing 25-30 tons, E-50 weighing 50-65 tons, [and] E-100 weighing 100-130 tons."

It emerged that Kniepkamp conceived the Entwicklung programme in May 1942, which was approved in April 1943. A major design consideration was that despite "the technical superiority of forward drive… the military advantage of having the drive at the rear where it was not endangered by mines" was influential, and "rear drive was also favoured because of the 'clean' [spacious] fighting compartment achieved."

Designing a new arsenal

The British invited Kniepkamp to go over each E-series design in detail, starting with the E-10: "One of the features of its suspension is that it can be raised, enabling the tank to sit on its bottom. Since its ground clearance is 450mm, the E-10 can be lowered by this amount. The mechanism for this feature is a spindle with a power take-off drive from the main motor. When the vehicle is operating on smooth ground, it is possible to lower the suspension to any extent desired. The weight of the mechanism is only 250kg.

"The proposed motor was HL101, giving 500hp and producing a maximum road speed of 31mph. In the prototype the HL90 was contemplated. Both were V-12 types [but the] HL101 employed solid injection whereas the HL90 had a carburettor. There were three possible transmissions (Zahnradfabrik Electro-magnetic, Maybach-Olvar, and Voith torque converters), and three steering mechanisms; one derived from the Tiger II, one substituting two Voith converters for four conventional Tiger II clutches, and


An American officer poses next to the huge hull

a positive displacement axial piston pump/motor system built by Zahnraderfabrik."

The E-10 was to be armed with a six-barrel rocket projector or a 7.5cm L/48 gun in a turretless mounting. Its armour was light, 50mm at the front (angled 60°) and 20mm on the sides. Curiously, Kniepkamp claimed three prototypes were under construction in Silesia, where they were captured by the Soviets. No trace of them has been found.

Likewise, Kniepkamp elaborated on the E-25, this was "was essentially the same as the E-10 [but without variable suspension] except the engine was to be supercharged to 700hp, and it had 30mm side armour and 70mm at the front.

"There were two proposals, one with a turret for use as a scout vehicle, and the other without a turret and used as a tank destroyer – the armament on both was to be 7.5cm L/70 gun. The design was made by Argus Werke at Karlsruhe, and activity was evacuated to Heimschule, where Dr Klaue was in charge". Plan drawings were seized from Klaue in May 1945.

Again, three hulls were reported to be at Alkett in Berlin-Spandau, but no trace of these has been found.

The proposals for the E-50 and E-75 perhaps best summarise the E-series' standardisation aims – the E-75 a heavy tank design, and apparently a late addition: "The hulls of the E-50 and E-75 were similar to Panther and Tiger II, but with thicker front armour. Development of each vehicle's components was in progress – no plans for assembly had been formulated. The suspension was the same for each, the E-50 with six units per side, and the E-75 with nine per side. Instead of using full interleaved running gear like on Tiger, two rows of staggered road wheels were selected. The E-50's combat track was also to serve as the shipping track for E-75.

"Two motors were considered, the 900hp HL234 with dual injection, supercharged to 1,200hp, or the same engine but operated as a diesel (by swapping the cylinder head) producing 650hp at 900rpm. A third motor suggested was a Klockner-Humbolt-Deutz diesel rated at 750-900hp and was completely interchangeable with the HL234."

One of the transmission units considered was a Mekydro type jointly designed by Maybach, Zahnradfabrik, AEG and Voith.

White elephant

That leaves the giant: the E-100. Its development was slowed by Allied bombing and a scarcity of raw materials, as well as delays transporting parts to Haustenbeck. Moreover, the work was low priority, with one report stating only three Adler employees had been assigned to it.

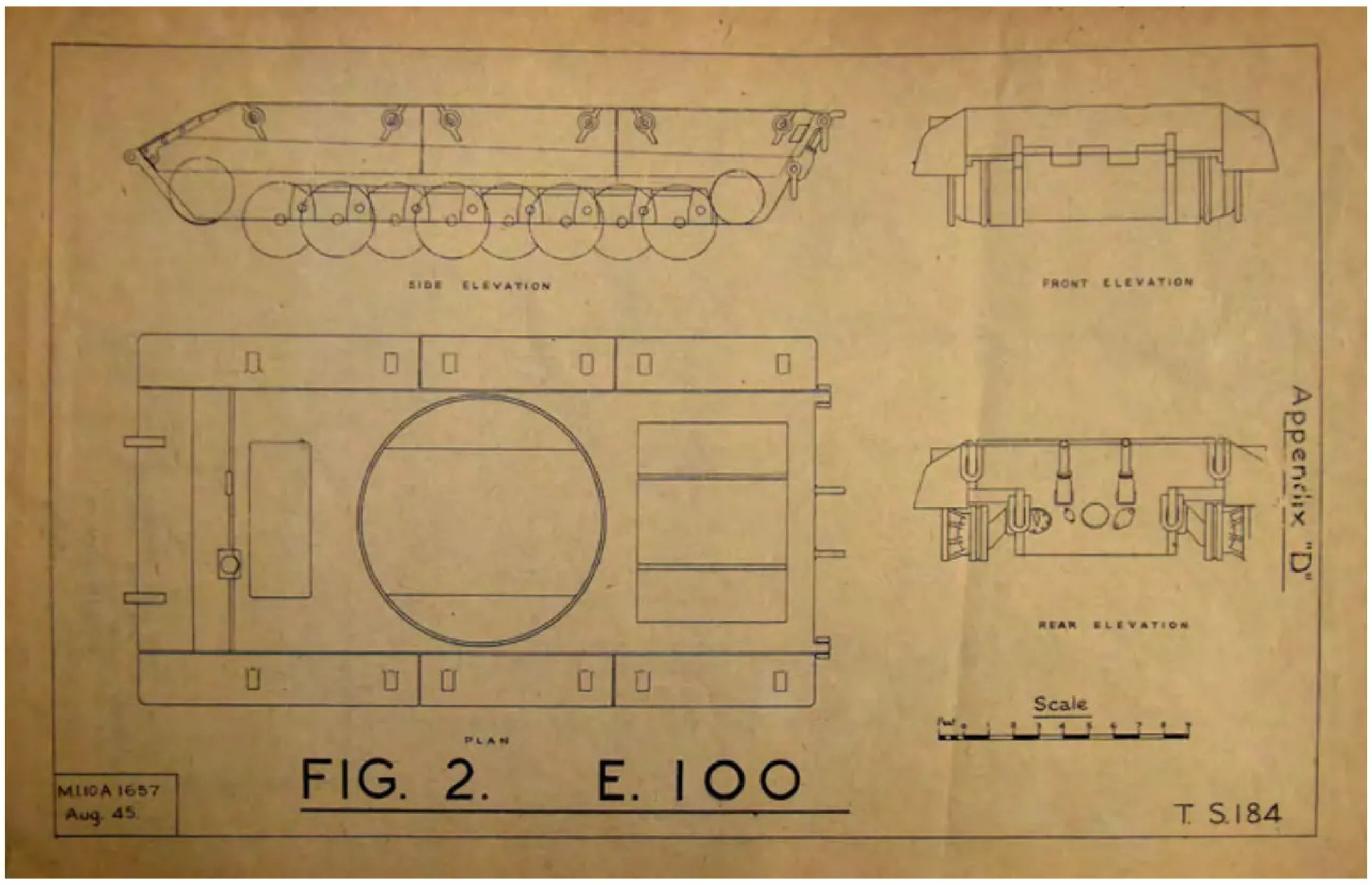
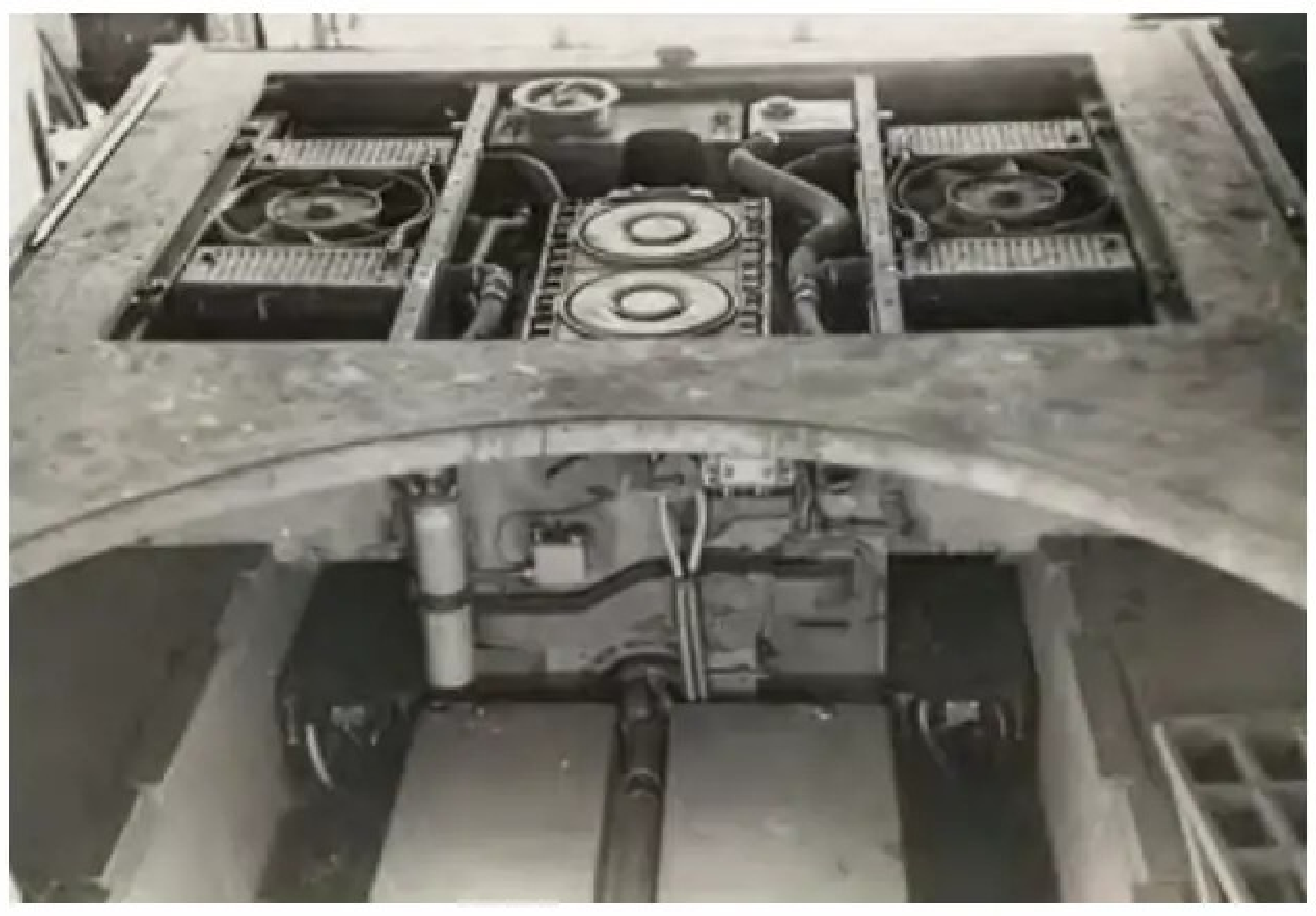
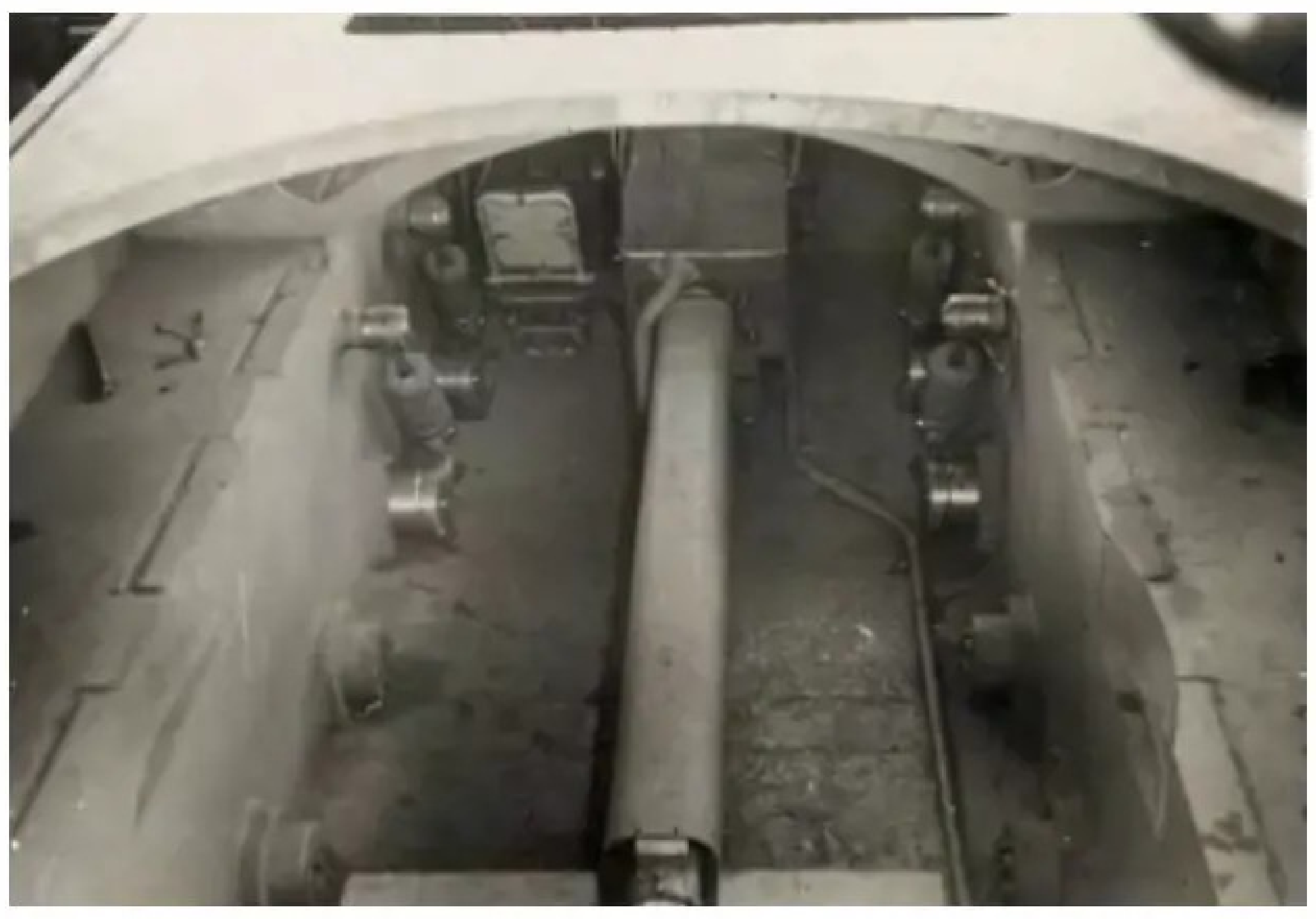


FIG. 2. E. 100





ABOVE LEFT: **American servicemen examine the partially built E-100 hull**

ABOVE CENTER: **Captured E-100 track links next to a US Army jeep. The weight links measured almost 40in across**

ABOVE RIGHT: **The E-100's Maybach engine and cooling systems after the engine covers had been removed**

ABOVE: **The driver's position and main gear box at the front of the hull. The enclosed section running through the hull is the drive shaft cover. Note the cut-out sections in the hull sides accommodate the turret basket**

BELOW: **One of a series of E-100 technical drawings completed by Britain's MI10**

The E-100 was an alternative to the Panzerkampfwagen VIII Maus, a 188-tonne super heavy tank – probably the heaviest armoured fighting vehicle built – which was undergoing trials in 1944. Two Maus hulls and a single turret were completed before the Kummersdorf proving ground was captured by the Soviets. They mated the surviving turret with one of the hulls, and the vehicle survives in the Kubinka Tank Museum, near Moscow.

Kniepkamp told the British: "The E-100 started with a rear drive – but only on paper. The front drive version was well on the way and was intended to be assembled by summer 1944, but bombing disrupted it. There were only two proposed suspension systems for the E-100; the Jenschke design with twin dual-coil springs, or the Auto Union design as used in the other E-series tanks."

The E-100 was to be powered by a Maybach HL230 P30 V-12 petrol engine, producing 700hp. This was fitted to the E-100 hull, together with a Maybach OG40 Schaltgetriebe transmission and a Henschel L801 Zweiradien Lenkgetriebe two-radius steering unit. This gave the E-100 a predicted road speed of 14.29 mph – sluggish, but notably superior to the Maus' 12.42mph. However, the Mekydro transmission was to be installed in May

HOW TO KILL AN E-100?

Had they entered service, the E-100 was envisaged for combat on the Eastern Front, so the British were unlikely to have encountered them – however, what could the British do to knock an E-100 out?

Odds are, nothing different, as the tanks might have rendered themselves unserviceable. Germany's Tiger I/II tanks already presented logistical challenges and were more difficult to transport. While both were surprisingly mobile on the battlefield, their reliability was problematic, and it was difficult to recover them or replace/repair their track in the field. The weight of the E-100 poses a problem as to jack up the running gear would necessitate it be moved to firm ground. However, Germany lacked heavy recovery vehicles, with the number of Bergetiger tanks produced disputed while the Bergepanther could only winch about 40-45 tonnes. A dedicated E-100 recovery vehicle would be needed, but evidence for such a vehicle is non-existent.

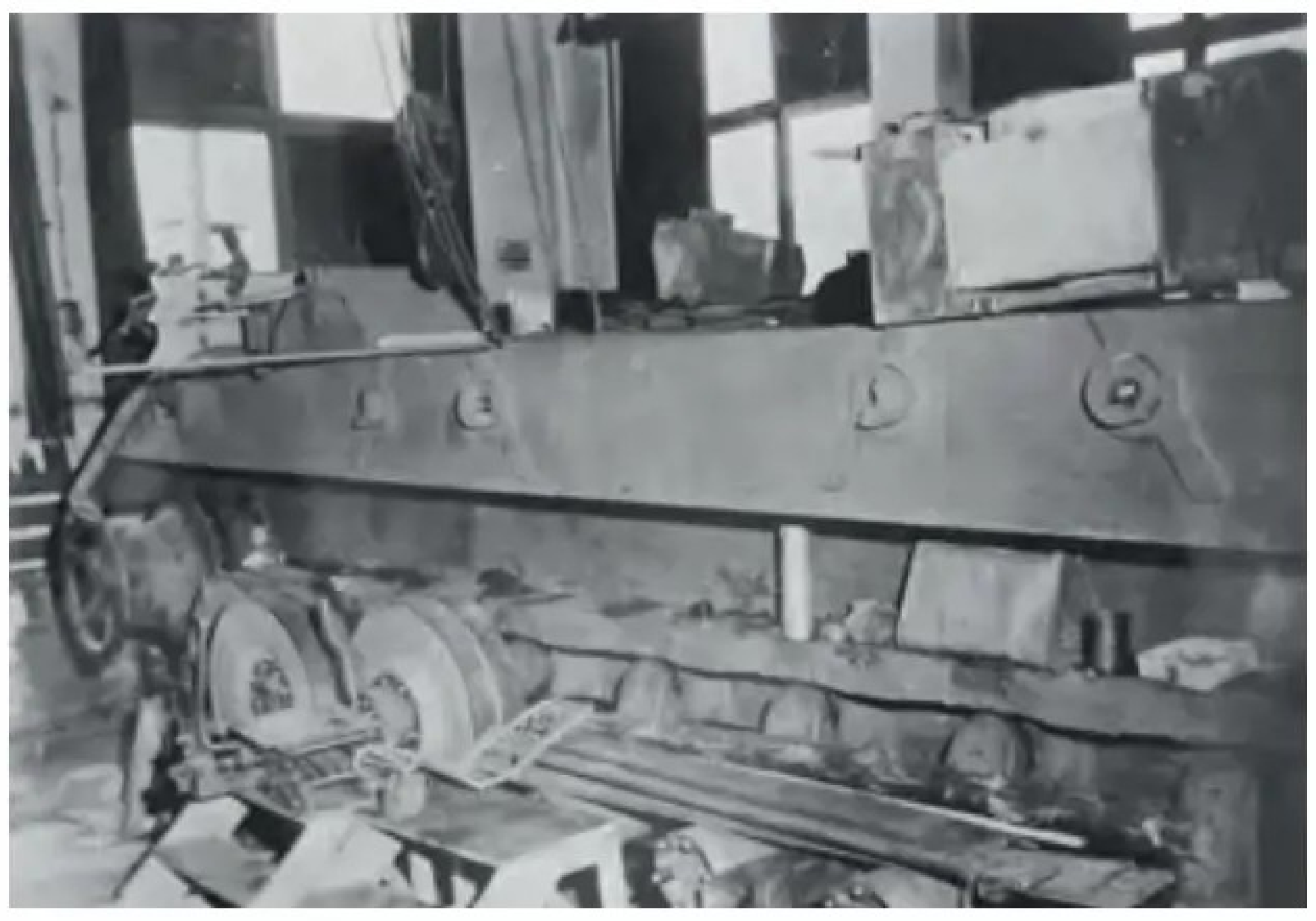
The British, therefore, could wait for the tanks to break down, and harass them to ensure nothing able to assist them could get near it. Alternatively, destroying strategic infrastructure would make the already challenging task of moving an E-100 by road or rail more arduous, preventing their arrival on the battlefield entirely.

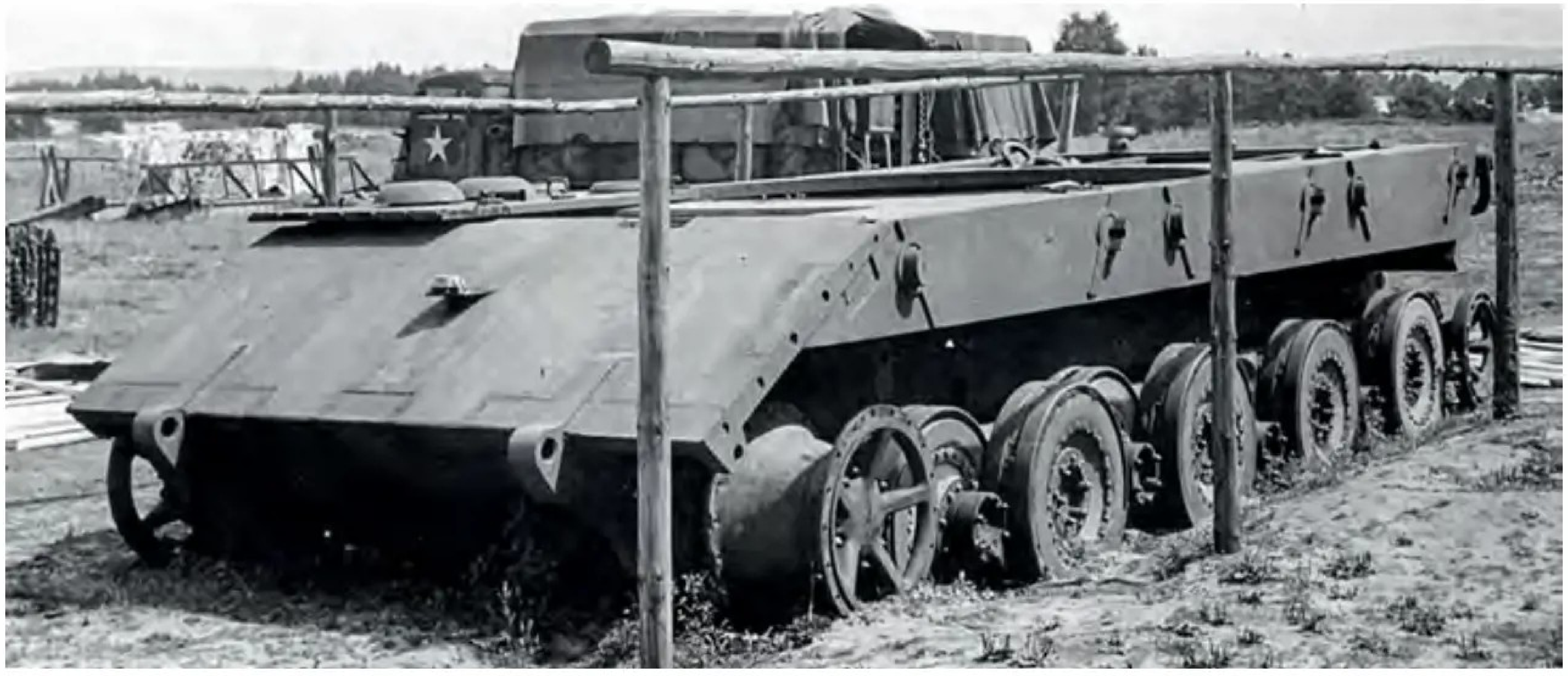
Failing that, a mobility kill would be viable. E-100s would have had the same vulnerability to airburst munitions as the Tiger I/II and Panther, as the air intakes were only lightly protected. Splinters and shrapnel could enter and puncture the radiator, causing leaks and overheating. Moreover, 17-pounder, 77mm HV and 76mm guns or double-stacked anti-tank mines could break its track or running gear with relative ease. If the opportunity for a 'K-kill' presented itself, then the same guns but also larger weapons in the British arsenal, could be expected to destroy an E-100 with a flanking shot – although these would struggle to penetrate the hull or turret fronts.

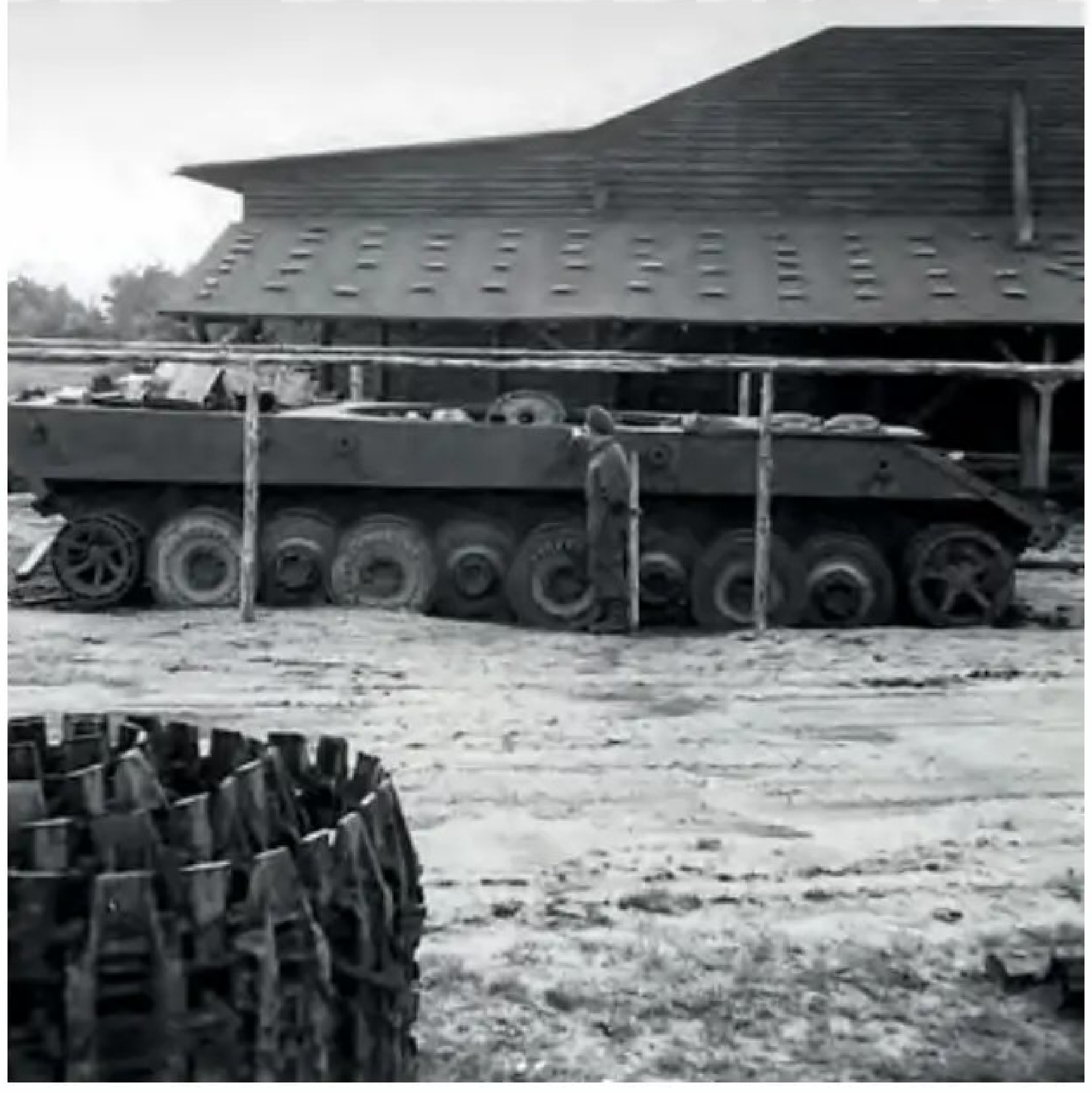
ENTWICKLUNG: FAKT ODER FIKTION?

Often termed 'paper panzers', the E-series is popular with enthusiasts and appear in video/tabletop games or as model kits. However, few of the designs are real – with just one example known to have been built.

PANZERKLEINZERSTÖRER RUTSCHER (E-5)	**Plausibel:** Diminutive tank hunter with two recoilless rifles developed in 1943, but abandoned for the Panzerjäger 38(t), with a mock-up possibly produced. Although sometimes designated E-5, it was not part of the E-series
E-10 JAGDPANZER/HETZER	**Fakt:** Low-profile tank destroyer with variable suspension designed by Klockner-Humboldt-Deutz Magirus AG to replace the Panzerjäger 38(t)
E-10 LEOPARD	**Fiktion:** E-10-based light tank with a Gefechtsaufklärer Leopard turret
E-15	**Fiktion:** Tank destroyer with an 8.8cm KwK 36 L/56 gun first developed as a model kit
E-25	**Fakt:** Low-profile tank destroyers/reconnaissance vehicles designed by Alkett, Argus, Adler and Porsche, armed with a 7.5cm PaK 42 L/70. Intended to replace Panzer III/Panzer IV-based vehicles
E-25 JAGUAR II	**Fiktion:** E-25-type 'Panzerjägerwagen' armed with a PaK 43 8.8cm gun
E-50 STANDARDPANZER	**Fakt:** Adler proposal for a common hull to replace Panther and Tiger I. Turret design drawings were never completed, nor was the main armament selected
E-50 FLAKPANZER	**Fiktion:** Anti-aircraft tank pairing two (real) 5.5cm Gerät 58 guns with the E-50 hull. Popularised as a model kit
E-50 SCHÜTZENPANZERWAGEN (BUFFEL)	**Plausibel:** Infantry fighting vehicle based on the E-50 design but armed with a (real) 3cm MK 103 cannon in a small turret
E-60 SABELZAHNTIGER	**Fiktion:** Series of heavy tanks/tank destroyers, including a twin gun design, popularised by model kits
E-75 STANDARDPANZER	**Fakt:** Adler's scaled-up E-50 to replace the Tiger II and Jagdtiger, fitted with a Schmalturm-style turret with 8.8cm L/71 gun, or Tiger II-style turret with 10.5cm HV gun
E-75 FLAKPANZER	**Fiktion:** Anti-aircraft tank pairing the real concept for the 5.5cm Flakzwilling Gerät 58 gun with the E-75 hull. Popularised as a model kit
E-79 SCHWARZWOLF/ZEKKE (PANTHER III)	**Fiktion:** A 61-tonne medium tank armed with the 12.8cm PaK 43 L/55 gun designed for the 1999 video game *Panzer Front*
E-90 (TIGER IIIL)	**Fiktion:** A super-heavy tank based on the E-100 that has gained notoriety on gaming forums
E-90 KROKODIL (JAGDTIGER II)	**Fiktion:** E-100 based tank destroyer designs featuring a variety of casemates and 15cm/17.5cm KwK guns
E-100	**Fakt:** Adler's 1944 development of a 1942 Krupp design for a super-heavy tank superior to the Maus. One partially completed and captured by the Allies
E-100 AUSF.B (TIGER III)	**Fiktion:** An E-100 with an alternative Henschel turret scratch-built by a modelmaker and later developed as an official model kit
E-100 KROKODIL	**Fiktion:** E-100-based, Jagdpanther-style tank destroyer armed with a 15cm/17.5cm KwK gun. It originated in a French historical magazine and was later popularised by model kits and its appearance in the video game *World of Tanks*
E-100 STURMPANZER	**Plausibel:** Assault gun with 15cm KwK 44 L/38 gun in a E-100-mounted casemate. An Adler technical report states that proposals for large gun E-100s must be turretless
E-100 GESCHÜTZWAGEN	**Fiktion:** E-100-based self-propelled gun armed with a 24cm K4 Sf gun. Popularised by its appearance in *World of Tanks*
E-100 WAFFENTRÄGER	**Fiktion:** A pairing of an 15cm anti-aircraft gun with a modified E-100 hull as a tank destroyer. Created for and popularised by *World of Tanks*
E-100 FLAKPANZER (I)	**Fiktion:** E-100-based anti-aircraft/anti-tank vehicle with a high-angle 12.8cm Flak 40 gun, popularised by a model kit
E-100 FLAKPANZER (II)	**Fiktion:** E-100-based anti-aircraft vehicle armed with twin 8.8cm anti-aircraft guns, popularised by a model kit







TOP LEFT: **The E-100's left side, with visible supports and threaded sections for spaced armoured track guards**

ABOVE LEFT: **Spaced armoured track guards for the E-100 discovered at the proving ground**

TOP RIGHT: **Outside The E-100 hull after it was moved outside from its small workshop**

ABOVE RIGHT: **A British soldier inspecting the E-100 hull, its road wheels have been installed so the vehicle could be moved, but note how it has sunk into the ground without its track fitted**

BOTTOM LEFT: **The E-100's turret was never built, but an impression of its size can be gleaned in this photograph of a US officer standing within the turret ring**

"The E-100's protection was still substantial, with 200mm upper hull plates"

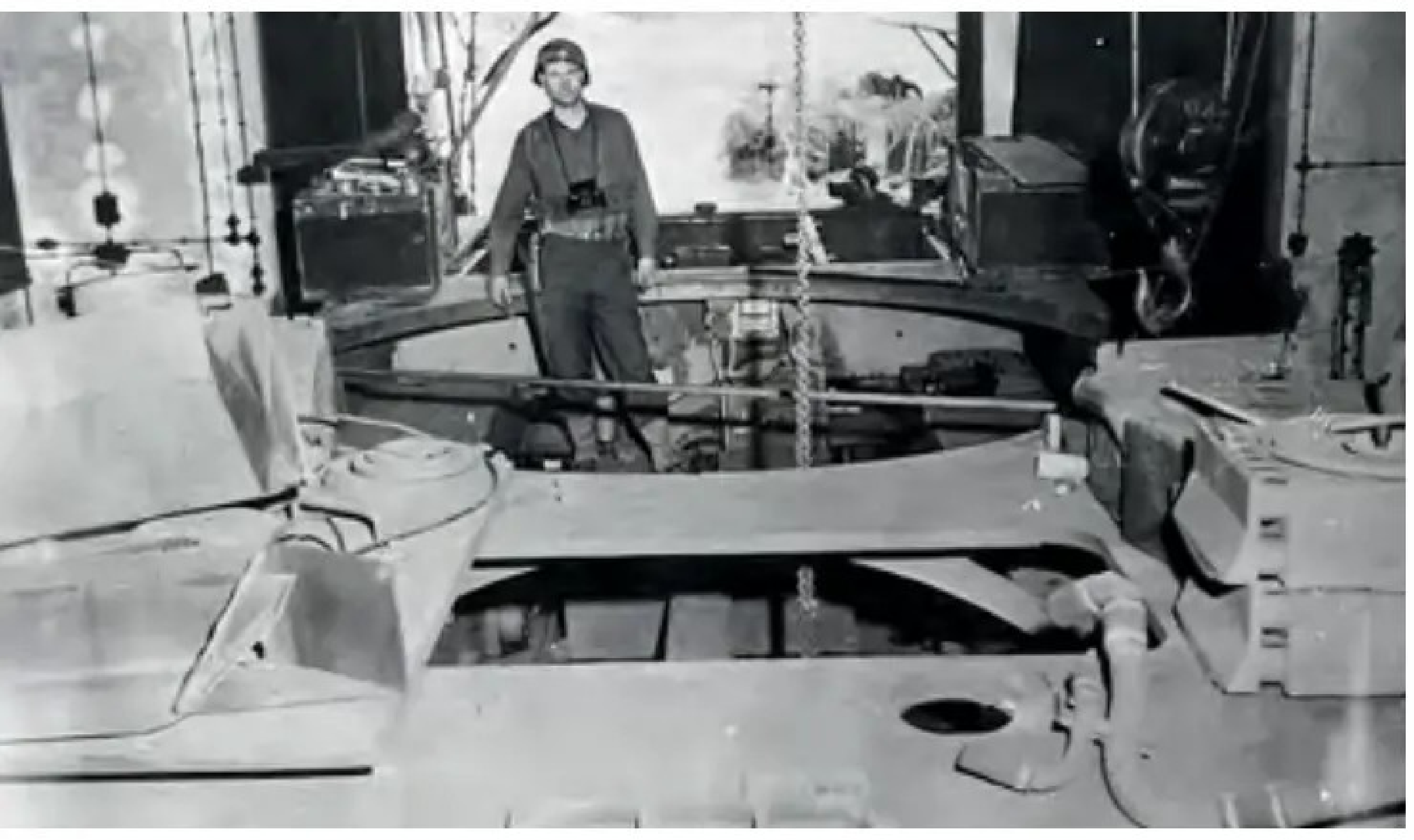
1945 after four years of tests, meaning "the motor could be rated at 10% above normal because of the hydro-dynamic element in the transmission." A supercharged 1,200hp Maybach engine was also envisaged, and it is suggested an E-100 configured this way may have attained 25mph.

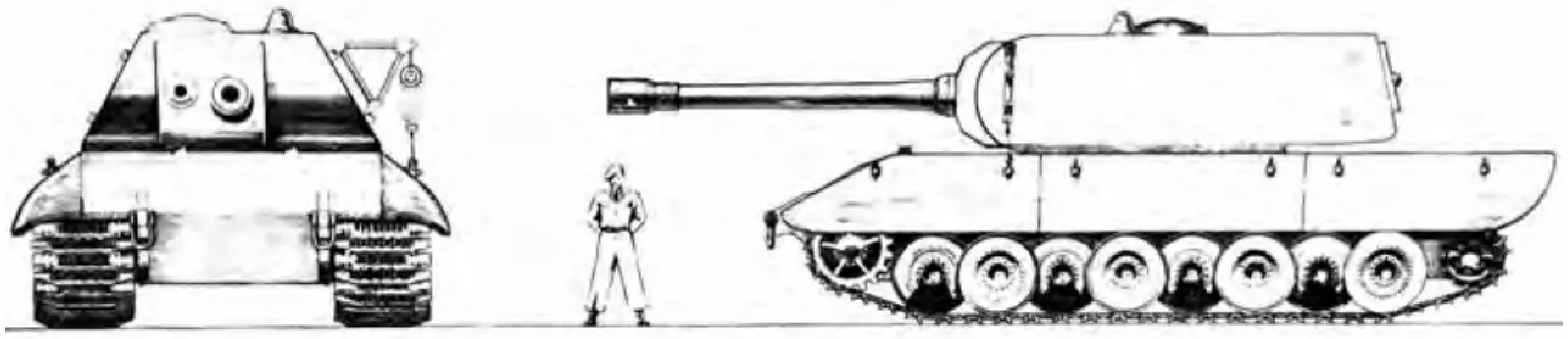
In addition to Kniepkamp's insights, the Allies captured a January 15, 1945-dated progress report within which were 64 photographs of the hull and various components. The wartime Combined Intelligence Objectives Sub-Committee circulated these photographs to the Allied countries – useful intelligence, some of which features in this article. The British Directorate of Military Intelligence Section 10 (MI10), responsible for weapons and technical analysis in World War Two and the early Cold War, also prepared fresh technical drawings.

Given its lighter weight, the E-100 was more thinly armoured than the Maus – but its protection was still substantial, with 200mm upper hull plates angled at 60° and 150mm thick lower hull front plates at 52°. The hull sides were up to 120mm, with similar thicknesses achieved on the rear surfaces but angled at 30°. The hull top was 40mm, while underside protection reached 80mm in places. No turret was built, but in May 1944 the drawings were completed by Krupp. The turret was to be similar to the Maus design, with a 200mm thick, well-sloped face angled at 30° and mounting a 12.8cm KwK L/55 gun – a formidable weapon that was fortunately rarely encountered – with a 7.5cm LwL L/24 coaxial gun and an MG34 machine gun. The turret sides were 80mm thick and sloped, while the rear plate was 150mm thick. This armour profile contributed to an envisaged combat weight of 130 tonnes.

However, the E-100 would have proven more a white elephant than the formidable Jötunn giants of German folklore. No design was going to deliver a victory for Germany that late in the war, and while some of the ambition and technical achievements are admirable, the E-100 was an experiment in futility. Practically, Germany's Panther, Tiger I and Tiger II tanks were already mechanically problematic and often had to be abandoned or destroyed even if an easily fixed break down occurred as the German panzer forces lacked the means to adequately recover them. Moreover, crippling fuel shortages would not have been eased by introducing an even bigger, even thirstier, tank with a range of, at best, a few dozen miles. Overall, the money, time and resources invested in the E-100 would have been better deployed in producing more Panzer IVs or Panthers.

Ultimately, the E-100, Maus and the like were wasteful distractions – and, as the British learned, they were useless. Intentions to complete the E-100 for trials to assess the mobility and logistical challenges of fielding super-heavy tanks, thereby informing requirements for future tank designs, were halted as Britain's 80-tonne A39 Tortoise assault gun prototype could do the same thing. The gathered notes and intelligence were confined to the archives, while the E-100's giant hull remained at Chertsey until the 1950s when it was finally sent for scrap, having offered no significant insight into heavy tank design or manufacturing – and having fallen short as a German 'wunderwaffe.' BW





A post-war British pictorial construction of the complete E-100

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Miracle Marksman?

Platon Alexiades and **Ross J Robertson** take a closer look at how a one-in-a-million shot thwarted Nazi intentions at a pivotal moment during the April 1941 invasion of Greece

German Fallschirmjäger and their weapons containers descend from Ju 52s during the assault on the Corinth Canal. Their efforts would be thwarted by an apparent one-in-a-million shot AP/ALAMY

"Alors, c'est la guerre!" – Then it is war! – was Greek Prime Minister Ioannis Metaxas' response (in French, the diplomatic language of the day) after being woken from his slumber in the early hours of October 28, 1940. The Italian ambassador had just delivered an ultimatum: allow Italian troops amassed on the Albanian border to occupy positions on Greek soil or face the consequences.

By dawn, the Italians had invaded – promptly shooting themselves in the proverbial foot in the process. Against expectation, Greece staunchly resisted the violation of its border, repelling initial assaults and launching bold counterattacks that pushed the Italians back into Albania. After the collapse of France and the loss of Norway, it was the Allies' very first significant ground victory in the war – though progress eventually stalled, leading to a winter stalemate.

However, Italy needed a quick victory, it depended on petroleum from Romanian oil fields which had to be transported from the Black Sea, via the Aegean and across the Adriatic. Already at war with Britain, Mussolini's unwise move on Greece meant the Corinth Canal, a four-mile-long artificial waterway that cuts through the isthmus between the Peloponnese and mainland Greece, connecting the Aegean and Adriatic, would be closed to this vital supply route. The only alternative was to navigate around the Peloponnese in full gaze of the Royal Navy. Denied passage by circumstances of their own making, the Italians became determined to take control of the Corinth Canal.

An exacerbating situation

On March 16, 1941, General Mario Rotta proposed Project 2P, involving 40 specially trained San Marco (Italian Marines), paratroopers and naval support. However, logistical issues and a lack of aircraft foiled the plan. A subsequent memorandum on April 5 detailed a considerably larger force of 740 men, including the elite San Marco parachute unit and heavily equipped with 114 machine guns and a dozen flamethrowers, but unfolding circumstances prevented its execution.

In March, the Italians had launched a costly and unsuccessful offensive against the Greeks in Albania. Until then, British support in the Greco-Italian conflict had been limited to matériel and a few RAF squadrons. However, with Bulgaria joining the Axis on March 1, it became clear Germany would also come to Italy's aid. In response, Operation Lustre urgently deployed around 62,000 British and Commonwealth troops from North Africa to mainland Greece as a counter to the threat. However, it would prove too little and too late.

Unternehmen (Operation) Marita, launched by the Germans, unleashed a devastating assault on April 6. Simultaneously attacking Greece and Yugoslavia from its staging posts in Bulgaria, the onslaught overwhelmed the Metaxas defensive line on the Bulgarian border. Meanwhile, German forces surged through Yugoslavia and advanced south, posing a direct threat to Greek troops on the Albanian front further west. Faced with being cut off, the Greeks had no choice but to retreat.

Amid the confusion, General Georgios Tsolakoglou made the fateful choice of surrendering the Greek Army on April 20 without proper authorisation. Meanwhile, the redirected British-led forces found themselves turning tail and heading south for naval evacuation. Rearguard units fought to protect the retreat, while the main force sought escape to Crete or Egypt from evacuation points in the Peloponnese.

Race against time

The bottleneck was the single bridge over the Corinth Canal, and with the tantalising prospect of annihilating the British-led force, time was of the essence for the Germans. On April 22, Generaloberst Franz Halder, the German Army's Chief of Staff, met with Generalfeldmarschall Walther von Brauchitsch, the Army's C-in-C, to discuss Unternehmen Hannibal, the airborne assault aimed at capturing the bridge intact.

> ***"Immediate action should therefore be taken to block canal by explosives followed by blockships as soon as possible"***
>
> ADMIRAL DUDLEY POUND, FIRST SEA LORD

The Italians were reversed in their initial effort to secure Greece, necessitating Bulgar and German assistance UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER

RIGHT: **German Fallschirmjäger wait to board Ju 52 transports in Greece. Before long they would be dropped onto the Corinth Canal** BPP/ATHENS WAR MUSEUM

Frustrations ran high as the pair awaited Hitler's approval. Meanwhile, the 2. Fallschirmjäger Regiment – stationed in Plovdiv, Bulgaria – quickly moved to Larisa aerodrome, just 120 miles north of the canal. Despite their readiness, it took three days for Berlin to authorise the operation on April 25, finally setting the stage for action the following day.

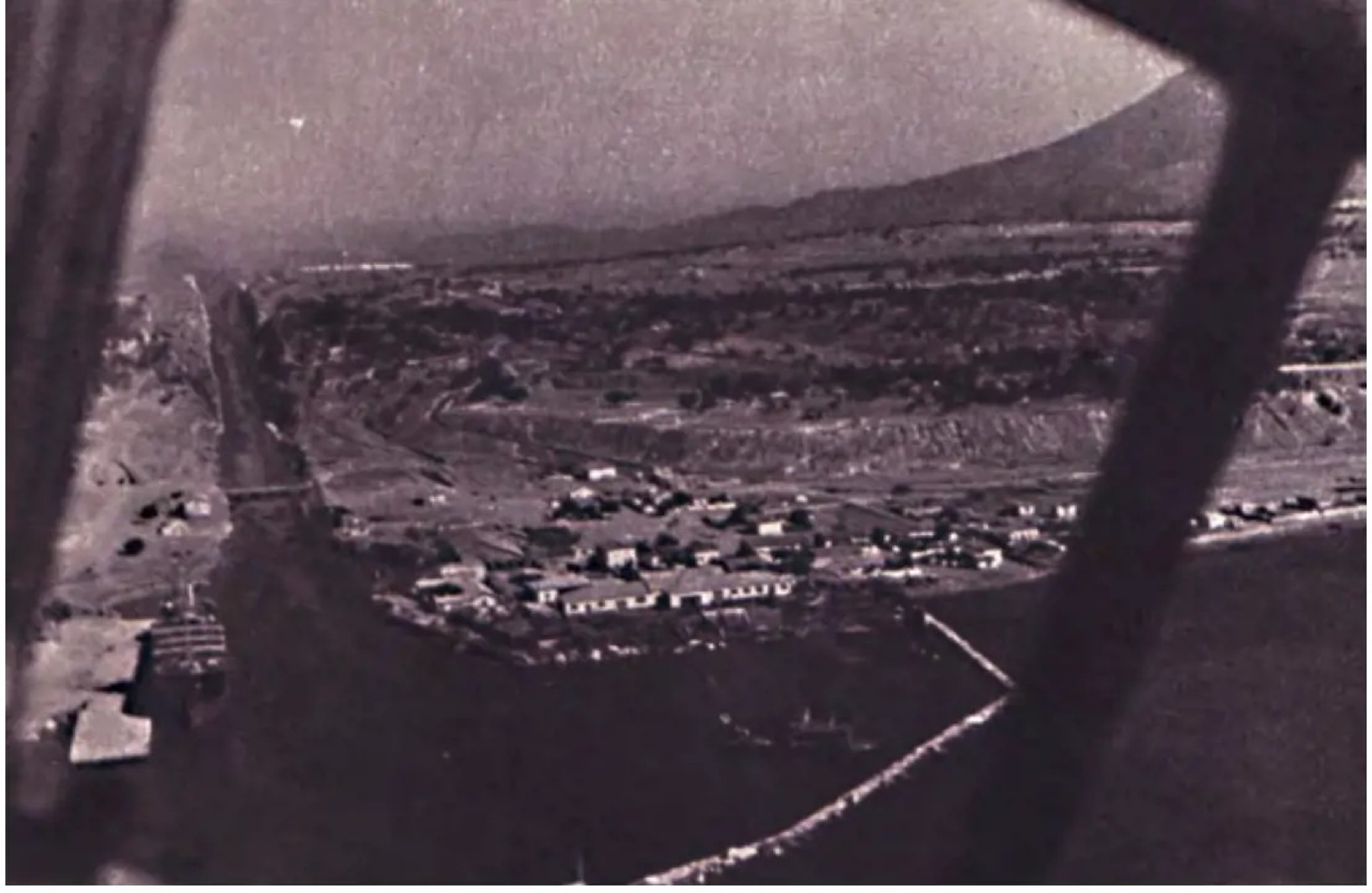
Unbeknown to the Germans, British High Command had received advance notice through decrypts at Bletchley Park. In the late afternoon of April 25, Admiral Dudley Pound, then First Sea Lord, sent a signal to Admiral Andrew Cunningham, Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean: "Information received shows Germans wish to avoid damaging the Corinth Canal, reports also indicate that it may be the intention to seize canal by use of parachutists to ensure its security (A.1). Immediate action should therefore be taken to block canal by explosives followed by blockships as soon as possible."

Previous plans to obstruct the canal had been devised, but either failed or were never conducted. The latest effort involved Lieutenant Mike Cumberlege, conducting clandestine operations in Greece on behalf of the Special Operations Executive (SOE), aboard the caïque *Dolphin II*. On April 24, he furtively deployed a magnetic mine in the canal, along with two time-delayed limpet mines. Eight depth charges were dropped nearby for good measure. However, these munitions never exploded.

Greek defences at the canal were lacking. A Greek anti-aircraft unit garrisoned the canal, but was ill-equipped, plagued by low morale, and desertions had reduced its number significantly. However, on April 25, there was an influx of makeshift reinforcements led by Major R Gordon of the 19th Wellington Battalion (New Zealand). This Isthmus Force included the 16th (Bhurtpore) Heavy Anti-Aircraft and 122nd Light Anti-Aircraft batteries, with support from the NZ Wellington West Coast Company, a contingent borrowed from the Australian 2/6th Battalion, and a squadron of light tanks from the 4th Queen's Own Hussars.

RIGHT: **Fallschirmjäger in their Ju 52 transport en route to their drop zone** BPP/ATHENS WAR MUSEUM

BELOW: **British and Australian troops arrive in Piraeus during Operation Lustre, the urgent effort to divert units from North Africa to Greece** ALAMY



LEFT: **A Luftwaffe photograph showing the entire length of the four-mile Corinth Canal, and its sole crossing point**
GERMAN RECORDS

The Eagle has landed!

Shortly before 0700hrs on April 26, nine Bf 110s approached the four 3.7in heavy anti-aircraft guns positioned about 1,500 yards south of the bridge. In his report, Major W Newey RA, CO 16th HAA Battery, states their bombs fell "hopelessly short." However, the battery was also strafed, forcing the crews to go to ground. Meanwhile, neighbouring 3in and Bofors 40mm guns joined the fray, engaging multiple Bf 109s and Bf 110s flying just 50ft off the deck as they wrought havoc on those below.

Another threat emerged as Ju 87 Stukas descended, their ominous wail signalling impending destruction. Newey reported: "The dive-bombers made numerous dives without releasing their bombs, likely to maximise the demoralising effect with their available ordnance."

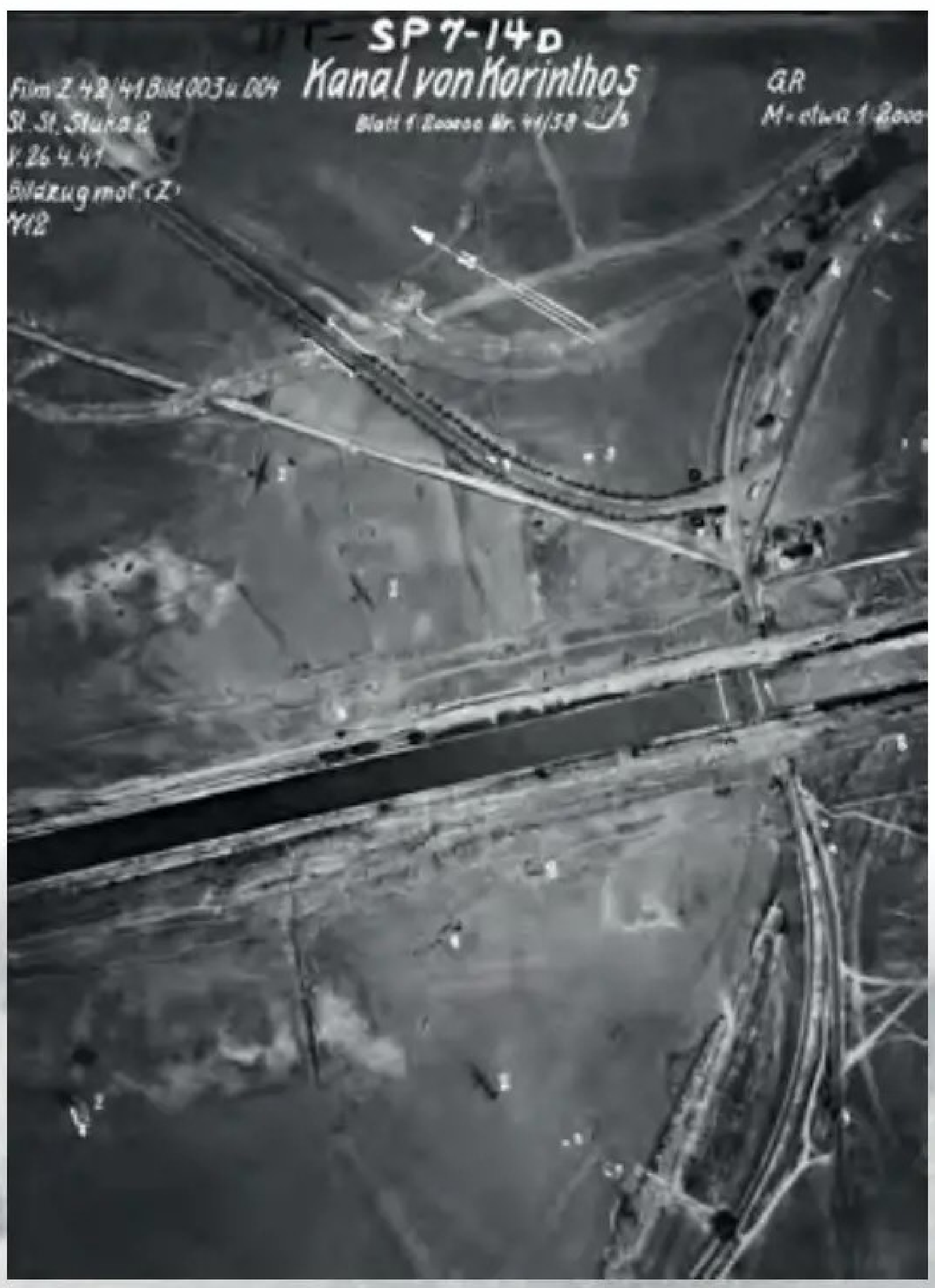
An estimated 100 to 130 aircraft shot up or bombed everything they could within two miles of the bridge. Efforts to keep the big 3.7in guns firing were futile against the Luftwaffe onslaught. With each pass, the Germans inflicted heavy casualties and dismantled the anti-aircraft emplacements, leaving crews dead or wounded and guns useless. Captain J Phillips of the Devon Regiment recalled: "…the anti-aircraft fire was silenced in a few minutes, but the strafing went on for about half an hour."

At 0725hrs, 15 Ju 52 transports approached from the sea. They came in low and slow, dangerously close to their stall speed. "They flew in groups of three, wingtip to wingtip, at a height of about 300ft. The speed at which they were able to fly was far slower than I had thought possible. The outer two machines of each group dropped personnel, while the inner one dropped stores," Phillips recounted, having watched Fallschirmjäger land on both sides of the canal.

"The men emerged from a large square hatch in the bottom and not from the side as shown in photographs that I have seen. The method seemed to be to dangle the folded parachute by its ropes through the hatch and jump after it as soon as it commenced to fill. The men came out thickly and their parachutes when opened appeared to be almost touching. They were only a few seconds in descending, and any attempt to shoot them 'on the wing' was out of the question."

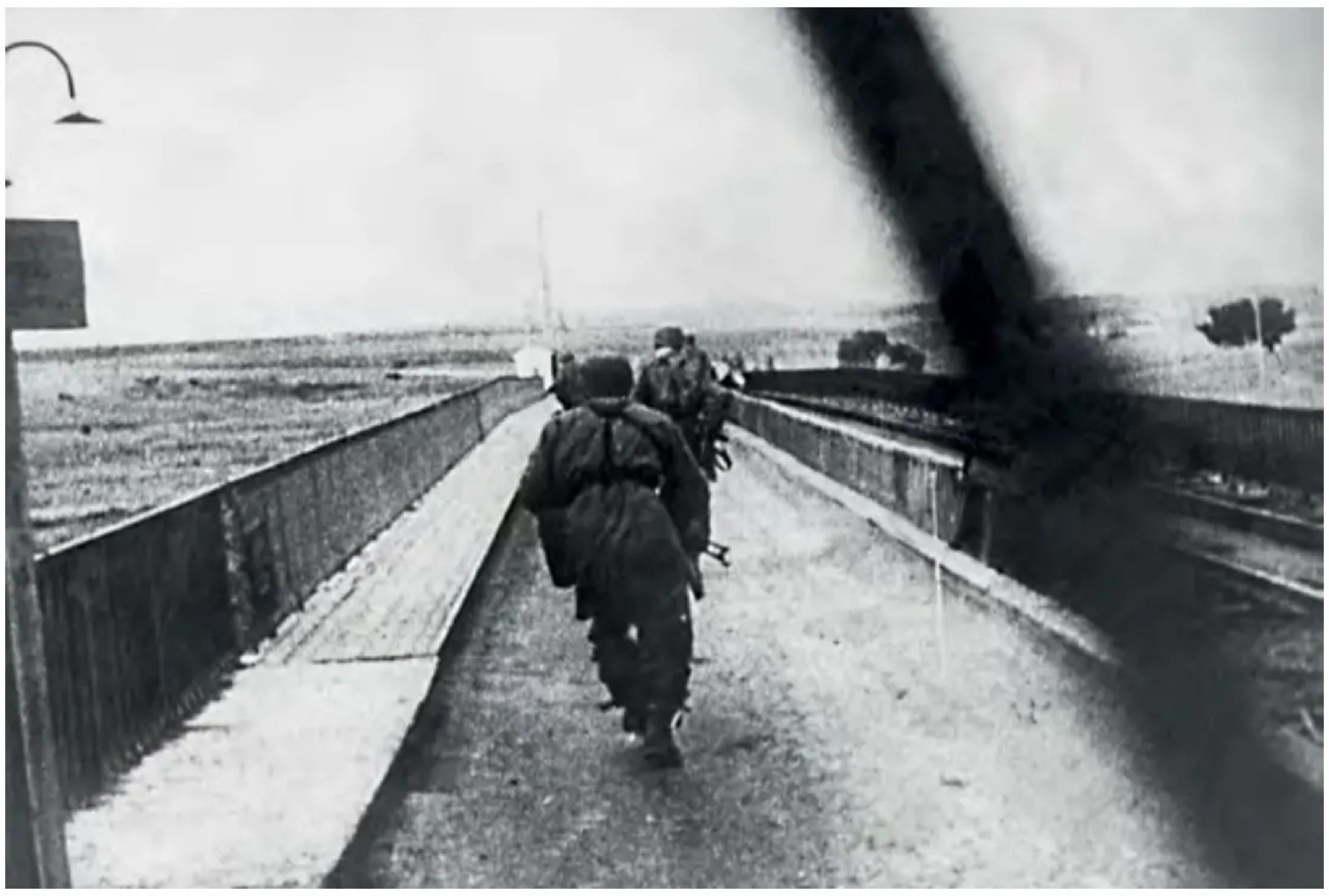
The fighters maintained top cover as each Ju 52, crammed with paratroops, unloaded its charges. Being so low, casualties occurred; parachutes failed to deploy, rigging became entangled and some men drowned in the canal. Newey noted: "I saw empty aircraft returning with parachutes flapping on their tails. Men had lost their lives through parting with their parachute at 50-100ft, which I took to be due to defective gear or the man's anxiety to get free from the parachute as early as possible."

Carrying only sidearms as well as knives to cut rigging, on landing the Fallschirmjäger hurried for the drop containers and canvas bundles containing their rifle, machine guns



LEFT: **An annotated German aerial photograph showing the aftermath of the assault on the bridge. German gliders and abandoned Allied positions and vehicles are marked on both sides of the canal, as is the destroyed bridge**
GERMAN RECORDS

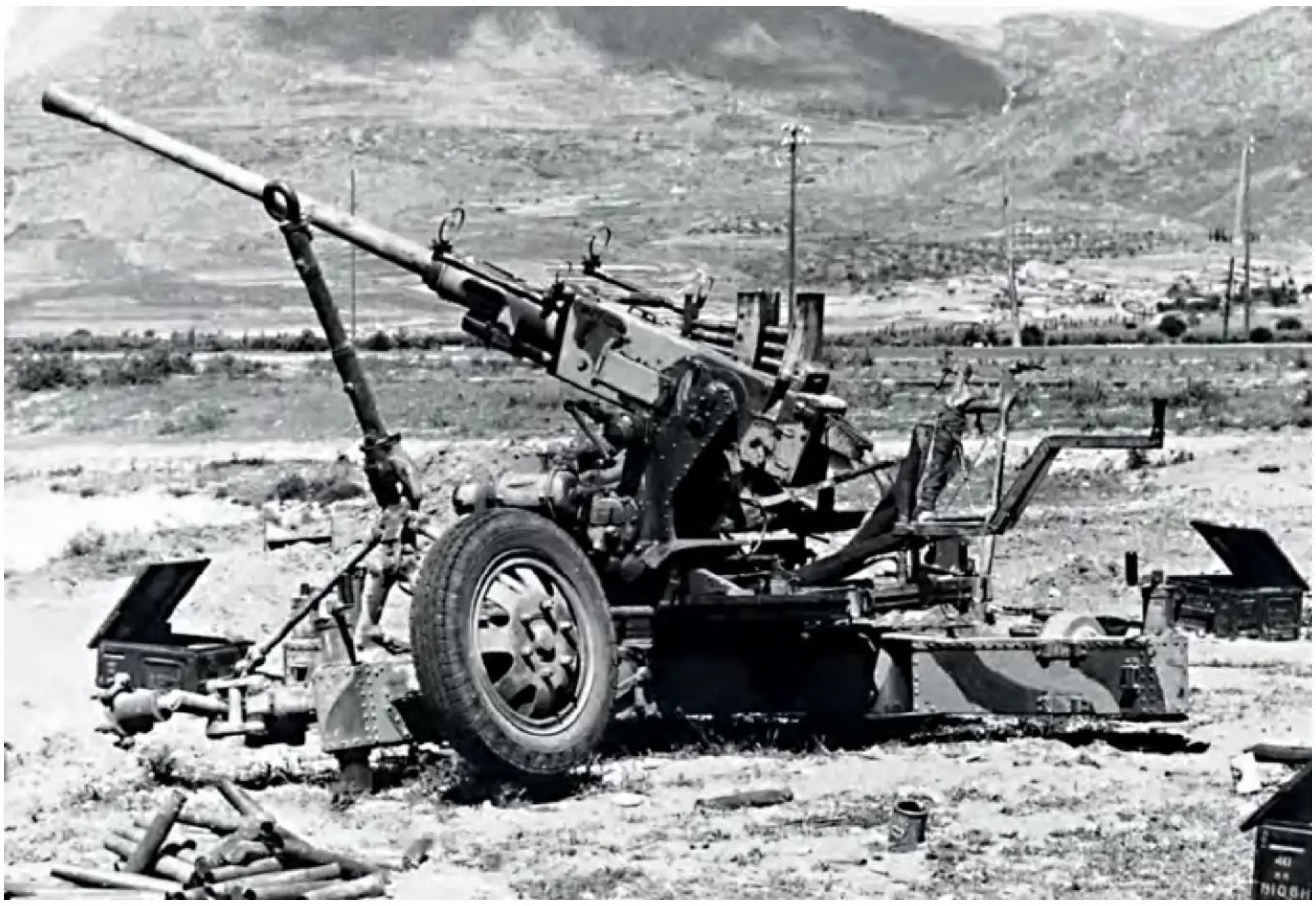
Stukas forward deployed to Larissa aerodrome, from where they supported the airborne assault to secure the canal
SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO/ALAMY



LEFT: **Fallschirmjäger, presumably Leutnant Teusen's engineers, on the canal bridge. A short while later, the crossing would be destroyed taking the men – and the photographer – with it** ULLSTEINBILD/TOPFOTO

and other weapons, marked with distinct grey, black or red parachutes. As reported by Lieutenant-Colonel W Leggatt to the General HQ at Cairo, the Germans promptly organised themselves and were "able to produce intensive machine gun fire within about two minutes".

Six DFS-230 gliders carrying 54 men of the 6. Fallschirmjäger Regiment appeared overhead. The British hit one, which crashed, while the others landed with remarkable accuracy on both sides of the bridge. Within moments, fully armed men emerged, led by Leutnants Hans Teusen and Haffner, who overwhelmed the nearby defences and captured the bridge. Anticipating the British had rigged it for demolition, Haffner's engineers began the dangerous task of locating the explosives – fully aware the mission hanged precariously in the balance.



BELOW: **One of the Bofors 40mm anti-aircraft guns used by the British to defend the bridge, where it was strafed and subsequently abandoned** AP/ALAMY

Plan 'B'?

A haunting spectacle followed as an unbroken procession of paratroopers descended along the entire length of the canal, from the Corinth Gulf to the Aegean Sea. Newey remarked: "They were positioned to seize control of the elevated ridge just south of the canal," and he estimated that within 30 minutes, 40 to 50 aircraft dropped 1,200 to 1,500 men.

In fact, more Luftwaffe transports may have sortied, as some sources claim up to 2,000 Fallschirmjäger were inserted. "The strafing continued just as intensively after the men had landed – particularly targeting troops seen moving in the vicinity of where parachutes had landed," Newey added.

British and Commonwealth troops who defended the canal being processed by their captors ULLSTEINBILD/TOPFOTO

The sudden assault thwarted Lieutenant John Tyson's ambitions to destroy the bridge. The Royal Engineer had assisted the 6th NZ Field Company Engineers, led by Lieutenant Wheeler, in preparing the bridge for demolition the previous day. They strapped guncotton to girders, more explosives under the abutments, and TNT and gelignite in the centre. Wheeler noted: "It was the first bridge of that type we had seen, so we made sure of the job. The plan was to blow it so that it would drop and block the canal."

Everything was wired up to a blasting machine (also known as a firing box or exploder) near the south end. However, the situation had changed. Captain Phillips, who shared a foxhole with Tyson, stated: "He began to talk of blowing the bridge. I did not see that he had a

RIGHT: **British soldiers having been captured by Fallschirmjäger at the bridge** SUEDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO/ALAMY

chance of reaching the detonator, which was no more than 15ft from a German glider that had landed.

Tyson proposed a daring alternative: shoot the explosives to trigger them. Both thought gelignite was volatile enough for the radical idea to succeed. Phillips recounts: "I climbed on a bank and took a shot at the packet of explosive I could see strapped to the side of the structure. The shot was a bad one and before I could reload, I was fired on." Tyson also attempted a shot but was unsuccessful. Despite rounds flying around them, they remained steadfast. Phillips recalled: "I jumped off the bank and readjusted the sights, climbed up again at a spot ten yards away, and scored a bull – the bridge blew up!"

Collapsing German ambition

Phillips' modesty belies the extraordinary precision of his shot and the devastation it unleashed. In an earth-shattering explosion downing out all other sounds of intense battle, the bridge disappeared in an inferno of shrapnel and smoke. The once sturdy steel structure crumbled into the chasm below.

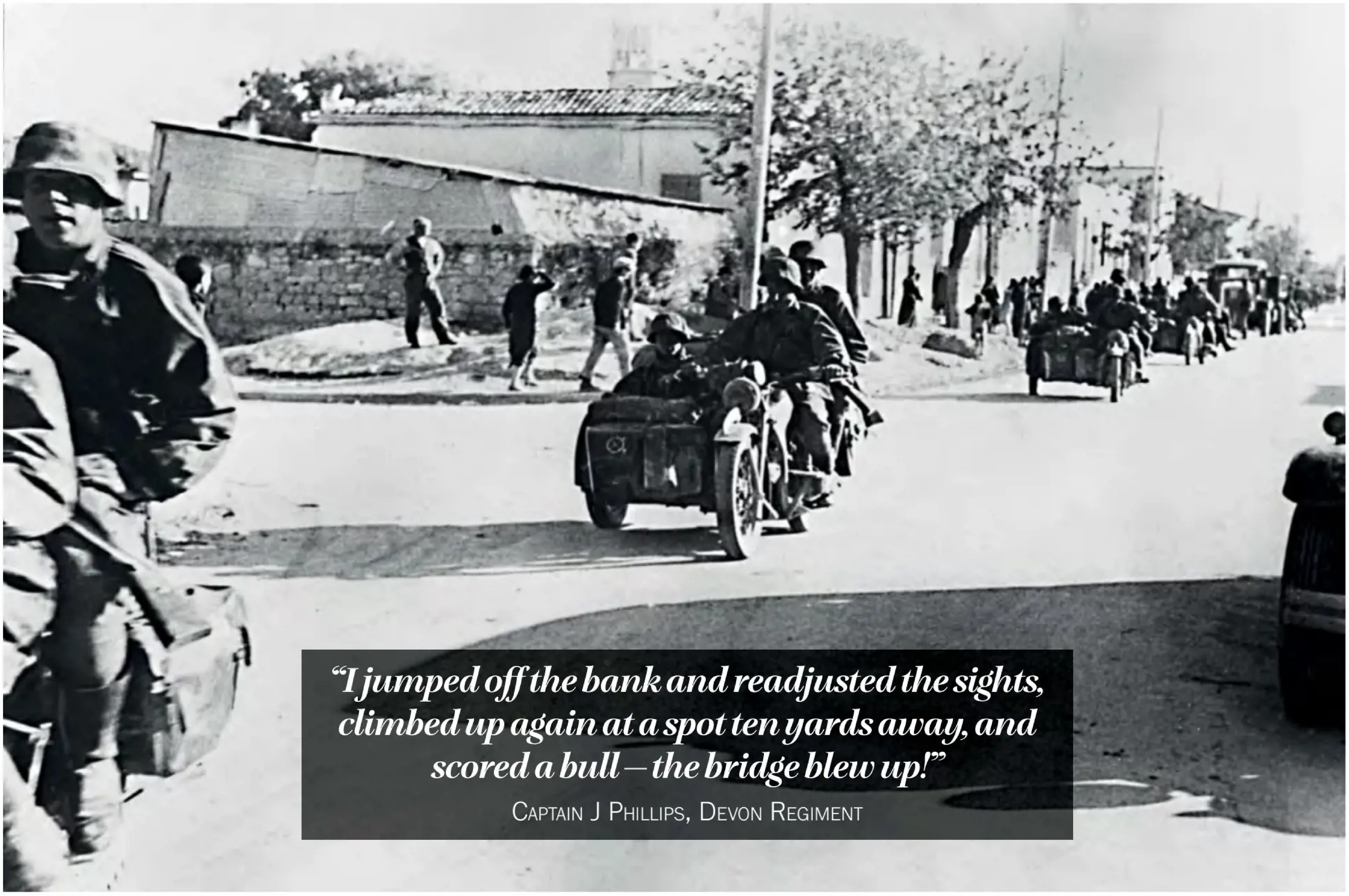
Whether or not his shot was aimed at charges strapped to the side, or a pile of explosives the German engineers had managed to clear is of little consequence. Teusen had failed in his mission and watched frozen in horror as the structure collapsed. A dozen of his engineers had been on the bridge, lost in an unforgiving plunge. Ironically, propaganda photographer Ernst von der Heyden was there to immortalise yet another Nazi victory and he too had been on the bridge, his wrecked camera later discovered amid the debris submerged in the canal.

The repercussions for the Germans were severe. The collapsed bridge impeded their advance but also became a significant barrier to navigation in the canal – a British objective that had eluded success. The toll of the assault was 79 Fallschirmjägers dead or missing and 174 wounded. However, with the area under German control, Anglo-Commonwealth troops on the wrong side of the canal were stranded – some 900 British and 1,500 Greek troops were captured in the canal area alone.

The remnants of the Isthmus Force fled to its evacuation points, while the Fallschirmjäger regrouped with Waffen SS reconnaissance units, led by SS Sturmbannführer Kurt Meyer. Clearing the wreckage would take time, but German engineers quickly erected a makeshift bridge, enabling the tanks of the 21. Panzer-Division to proceed south.

Simultaneously, a motorised regiment of the 1. SS-Panzer-Division

BELOW: **German reconnaissance units and elements of the 21. Panzer-Division were quick to cross a makeshift bridge and pursue the retreating Allies** AP/ALAMY



> *"I jumped off the bank and readjusted the sights, climbed up again at a spot ten yards away, and scored a bull – the bridge blew up!"*
>
> CAPTAIN J PHILLIPS, DEVON REGIMENT

'Leibstandarte SS Adolf Hitler' initiated crossings across the Gulf of Patras to Patra using commandeered fishing vessels. This manoeuvre further helped rout the Allies and facilitated the capture of the Peloponnese. Approximately 8,000 British and Allied troops were captured at the southernmost port of Kalamata. However, without Phillips' destruction of the bridge, that figure would likely have been substantially higher.

ABOVE: **SS troops unload a 5cm PaK 38 anti-tank gun and motorcycle/sidecar combinations from watercraft after crossing into Corinth** AP/ALAMY

Hard landing

In 1941, airborne assaults were still in their infancy, with the Fallschirmjäger using quick deployment Ruckenpackung Zwangauslosung (RZ) parachutes for low-level jumps. These minimised exposure to ground fire during the descent but necessitated the paratroopers retrieve their weapons from containers, dropped separately.

While the low-level drop facilitated rapid forming up on the ground, unlike normal Luftwaffe parachutes, the RZ lacked controls and left the men hanging face-forward from the waist, susceptible to hard landings. Notably, the casualty rate during Hannibal was magnified when Fallschirmjäger were extensively used in Unternehmen Merkur (Mercury), the invasion of Crete, a month later.

Newey noted another vulnerability: "The aeroplanes fly in wedges of three, very close together. It would be an ideal Bofors target owing to their size, slowness, and low altitude." German planners obviously factored this in, tasking the Luftwaffe with flak suppression. This highlights the total lack of Allied air power. "My own opinion is that in order to carry out this operation, the Germans had to have not merely air superiority but absolute air monopoly. A few British fighters, however outnumbered, might have prevented the strafing from being so intense," Newey concludes. However, the RAF was embroiled in the chaotic evacuation, and the only potential response were nine Hurricanes hidden in an olive grove outside nearby Argos – but these had been destroyed on the ground on April 23.

BELOW: **RAF lorries move British troops and RAF personnel to their evacuation point** ALAMY

The defence of the Corinth Canal was marred by disorganisation, with hastily assembled units lacking clear leadership and co-ordination. Greek commanders hesitated to deploy troops without orders from Athens, exacerbating the situation. The 4th Hussars squadron, responsible for the south bank, had only 12 Vickers Light Tanks for a 70-mile front, leaving just three or four near the bridge. Additional units arrived without clear instructions, while others focused on their own evacuations, hampering the defence.

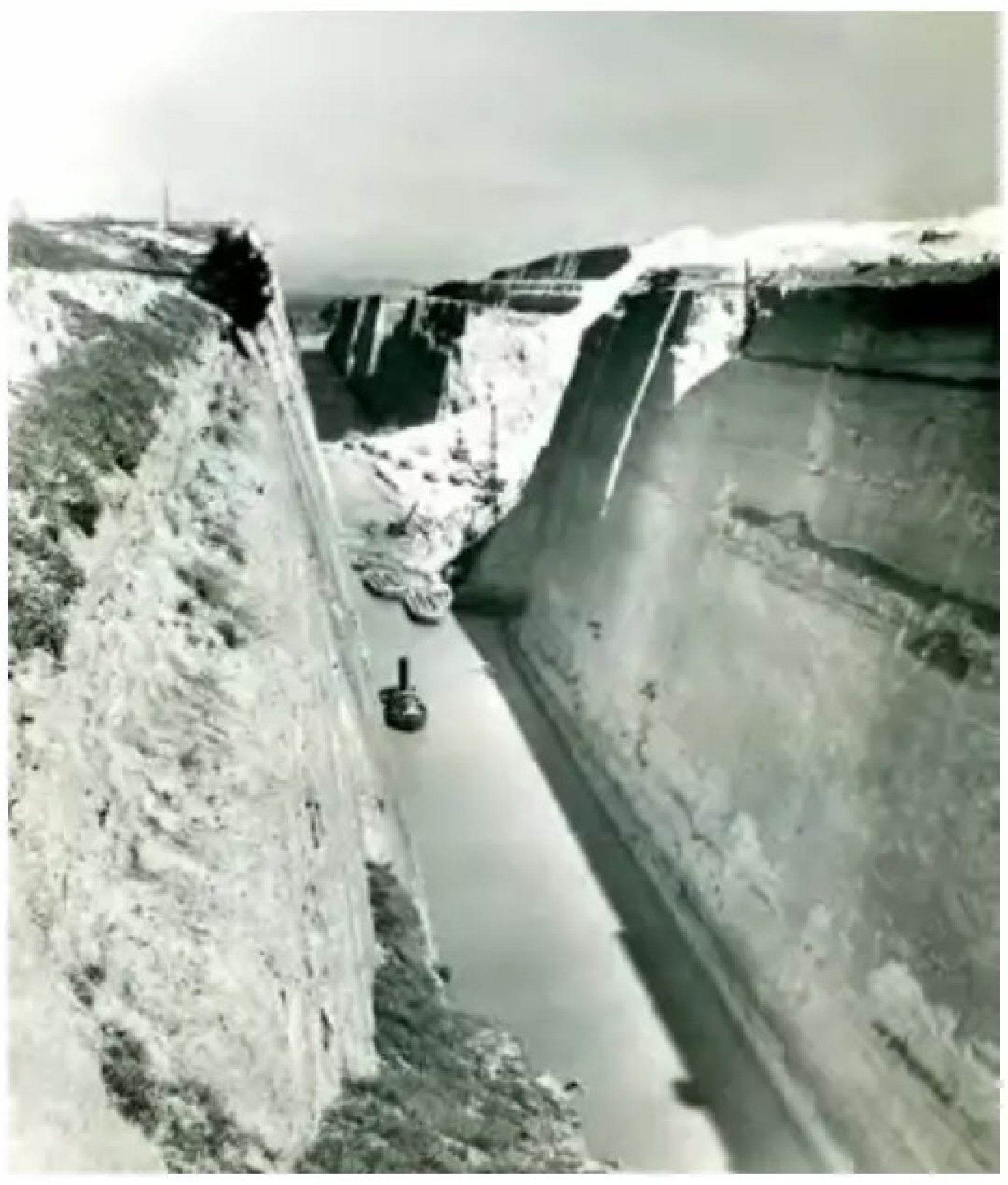
Restricted movement on roads compounded these challenges. Brigadier E Puttick, CO 4th NZ Infantry Brigade, described the evacuation route as "badly strafed and blocked by refugees, carts and donkeys going to the Peloponnese." Despite these obstacles, the valour displayed by the rearguard and the resolve of the Royal Navy enabled the evacuation of more than 50,000 Allied troops.

It is evident from records that the courage and dedication to duty of Phillips, who rose to the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel (Temporary) by 1944, and Tyson were recognised. Both were awarded the Military Cross in October 1941, while Newey received the Distinguished Service Order. An air accident took his life in 1945, and his grave can be found in the Imtarfa Military Cemetery in Malta. Despite the upheaval of the invasion, their exceptional contributions and those of their fellow soldiers were appreciated.

A miracle shot?

The element of luck, or at least its perception, also seems to have played a part. While Isthmus Force found itself outmatched and outnumbered,

ABOVE: **British vehicles abandoned along the Corinth-Nauplia road** AP/ALAMY



LEFT: **The damage sustained to the Corinth Canal by the 1941 action, as well as the German's October 1944 demolition of the crossing, as seen in 1948** US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

fortune favoured it. The Germans credited the destruction of the bridge to a twist of fate – a lucky strike from a British shell – and while this story persists, archival evidence reveals a truth even more remarkable: that the bridge was brought down by a single rifle shot, an extraordinary feat defying all odds.

While there is irrefutable archival evidence that Phillips made the one-in-a-million shot, the enormity of the achievement has led many to wonder whether it would have been possible for his well-aimed effort to have set off the demolition charges. Historian Major (Ret'd) Dr Konstantinos Giannakos, offered his opinion:

“Phillips was likely armed with the Lee-Enfield No.4 Mk.I, renowned for its accuracy, reliability, and rapid rate of fire. In good hands, it could deliver up to 30 aimed shots per minute. Chambered for .303 British, its most common round was the Mk.VII Ball, a 174-grain spitzer bullet which Phillips almost certainly used. Less common rounds included tracer, which aided aiming and signalling; incendiary, to ignite flammable materials; and armour-piercing.

“Gelignite is designed to resist accidental explosions from shock, fire, or impact. It requires a detonator or blasting cap to initiate the necessary shockwave for an explosion. Even tracer or incendiary rounds should not be enough to trigger a detonation – unless the explosive was already compromised.

“There is a small – but plausible – chance that Phillips' bullet caused the explosion. If the gelignite had been primed and connected to a sensitive detonator, especially an unstable or old one, then a well-placed shot could have triggered the explosion. Furthermore, if the gelignite had been placed in a confined space – such as a packed charge inside a structural cavity of the bridge – the pressure from a penetrating bullet, combined with pre-existing instability in the setup, might have been enough.

“However, the explosion may have resulted from a separate event, such as an accidental ignition caused by the Germans' own handling, or a stray British shell. Battlefield conditions are chaotic, and soldiers often misinterpret events, especially when under extreme stress and/or when cause and effect appear to align. It is entirely possible Phillips thought he caused the explosion when, in reality, it was coincidental.”

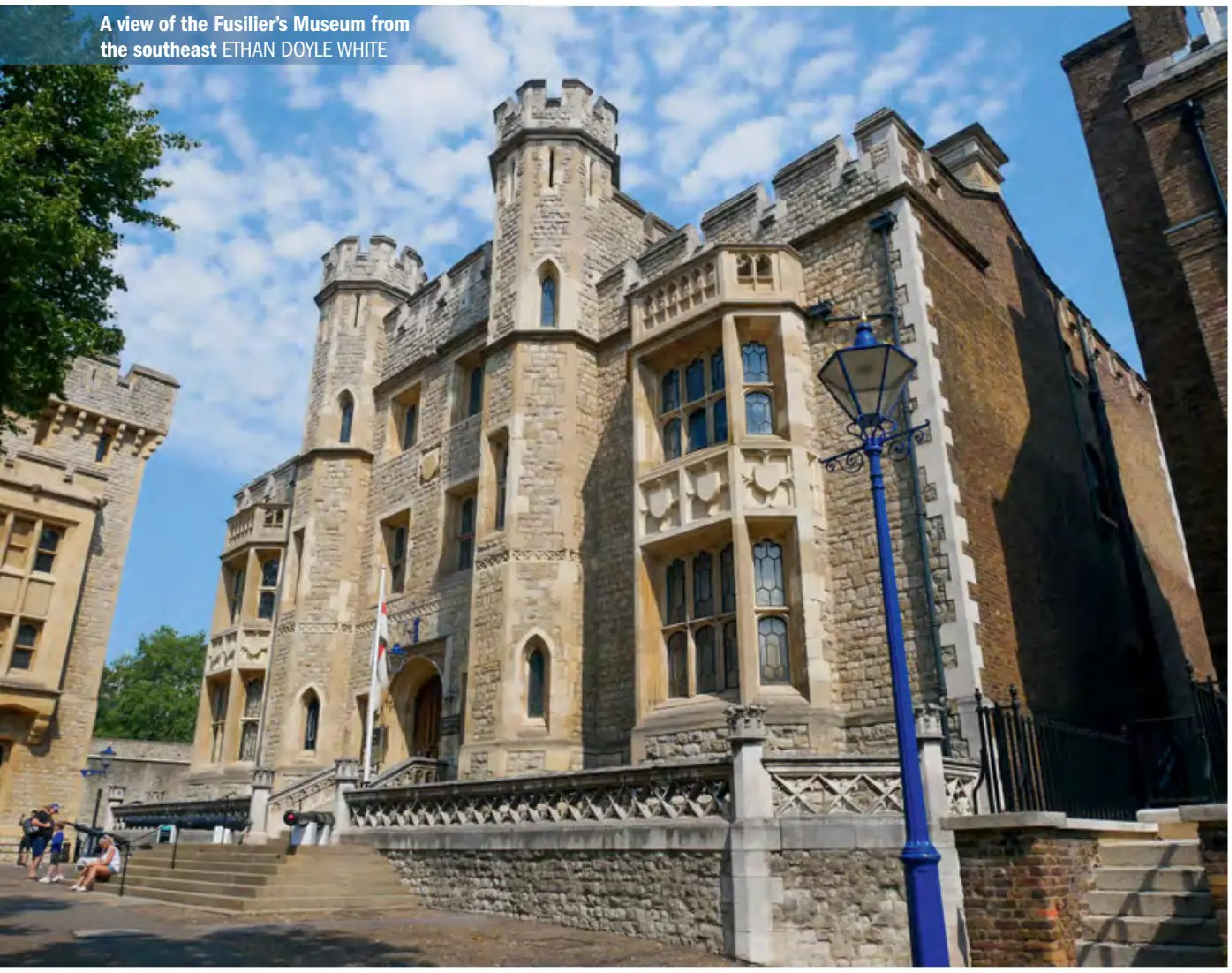
> ***“There is a small – but plausible – chance that Phillips' bullet caused the explosion”***
>
> MAJOR (RET'D) DR KONSTANTINOS GIANNAKOS, HISTORIAN

Ultimately, what matters most is not the specifics of what occurred, but the courage displayed by Tyson and Phillips. Tyson was a sapper, not a commando or infantry officer, and had no real business being there. With their lines overwhelmed and Fallschirmjäger filling the skies, they must have been acutely aware that the action would likely result in death or capture. Following the explosion, Tyson gathered scattered sections and led a series of counterattacks so he could cover the retreat – somehow also managing to extricate himself.

Phillips also demonstrated remarkable valour when he emerged from a second time, exposing himself in yet another attempt to fulfil his duty. It is this courage that should ensure the events at the Corinth Canal are remembered. BW

The authors thank Francis Dickinson, Tom O'Brien, and Major Konstantinos Giannakos HA (Ret'd), PhD for their assistance. Readers wanting more information are encouraged to read Platon Alexiades' Target Corinth, published in 2015 by Pen & Sword.

BELOW: **Allied troops unable to escape via the Royal Navy were captured in large numbers** AP/ALAMY



A view of the Fusilier's Museum from the southeast ETHAN DOYLE WHITE

The cabinet displaying a flintlock 'fusil' ALL IMAGES COURTESY OF FUSILIER'S MUSEUM LONDON UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

THE FUSILIER MUSEUM LONDON

Tucked inside the famous Tower of London, The Fusilier Museum London tells the 300-year story of one of Britain's most distinguished historic regiments, as **Tom Baker** found out

On August 23, 1914, men of the 4th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers, waited in nerve-straining silence on the embankments of the Mons-Condé Canal. Dug in around the Nimy Railway Bridge – a vital crossing on the British Expeditionary Force's exposed flank – the men's orders were clear: hold the bridge, delay the enemy advance, and buy time for the BEF to reposition.

Two Vickers machine guns were emplaced in a trench on the British side of the canal, positioned to sweep the narrow bridge crossing and the railway embankment beyond. The men tightened their hold on their trigger grips as Lieutenant Maurice Dease offered quiet words of reassurance. The first pickelhelmed figures emerged from the wood on the far bank, and the air erupted with gunfire.

Amid the unfolding chaos, Dease moved steadily along the trench, working tirelessly to direct fire and replace gunners. When both crews were killed, he took one over himself. Wounded multiple times, he refused to leave his post, continuing to fire until he finally slumped over – mortally wounded. Dease would be posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions at Mons – the first British soldier of World War One to receive the nation's highest award for gallantry.

However, as the position faltered and the Fusiliers made ready to withdraw, Private Sidney Godley offered to stay behind. For the next two hours, alone and under fire, Godley held the bridge. When the Vickers was irreparably damaged, Godley calmly dismantled the gun, threw its pieces into the canal, and withdrew. For his actions, Godley became the second British soldier and the first enlisted man to be awarded the Victoria Cross during the war.

More than a century later, displayed before me in The Fusilier Museum at the Tower of London, are exhibits that pay tribute to Dease and Godley, including the former's VC. The prestigious medal, displayed alongside dozens of other gallantry awards, represent just a fraction of the stories and artefacts housed within these walls. Steeped in centuries of history, the museum honours the legacy of the Royal Fusiliers Regiment and charts their distinguished service from their origins as an 'Ordnance Regiment' raised to protect the Royal Arsenal, to their amalgamation into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, and up to the present day.

The museum began in 1949 as a private collection of artefacts stored at Regimental Headquarters at the Tower of London. By 1962, The Fusilier Museum was established and officially opened to the public. In 2010, courtesy of the Heritage Lottery Fund, the museum underwent a major redevelopment under a project entitled Fusiliers Advance! – adding comprehensive interactivity, moving graphics, and innovative touchscreen showcases.

A view of the Early History gallery, including the Eagle Standard of the French 82nd Regiment

Display cases in the Late History gallery

Upon entering the museum, a glass cabinet displays a flintlock 'fusil' – an innovative type of musket introduced in the late 17th century which used a flint-striking mechanism as opposed to a burning piece of flammable twine. The Royal Fusiliers and its three contemporaries – the Royal Northumberland, Royal Warwickshire and Lancashire Fusiliers – were the first English Regiments to receive this new style of firearm, hence the title 'Fuziliers' – latterly spelt Fusiliers.

In the Paintings corridor, portraits of notable individuals from the Royal Fusiliers' history can be found. One among them is Lieutenant-Colonel Norman McMahon, the officer commanding the 4th Battalion during World War One. He was best known for instigating the 'mad minute' in British training regimes during his time spent as Chief Instructor of the British Small Arms School. This required soldiers to be capable of firing at least 15 aimed shots per minute with their bolt-action rifles.

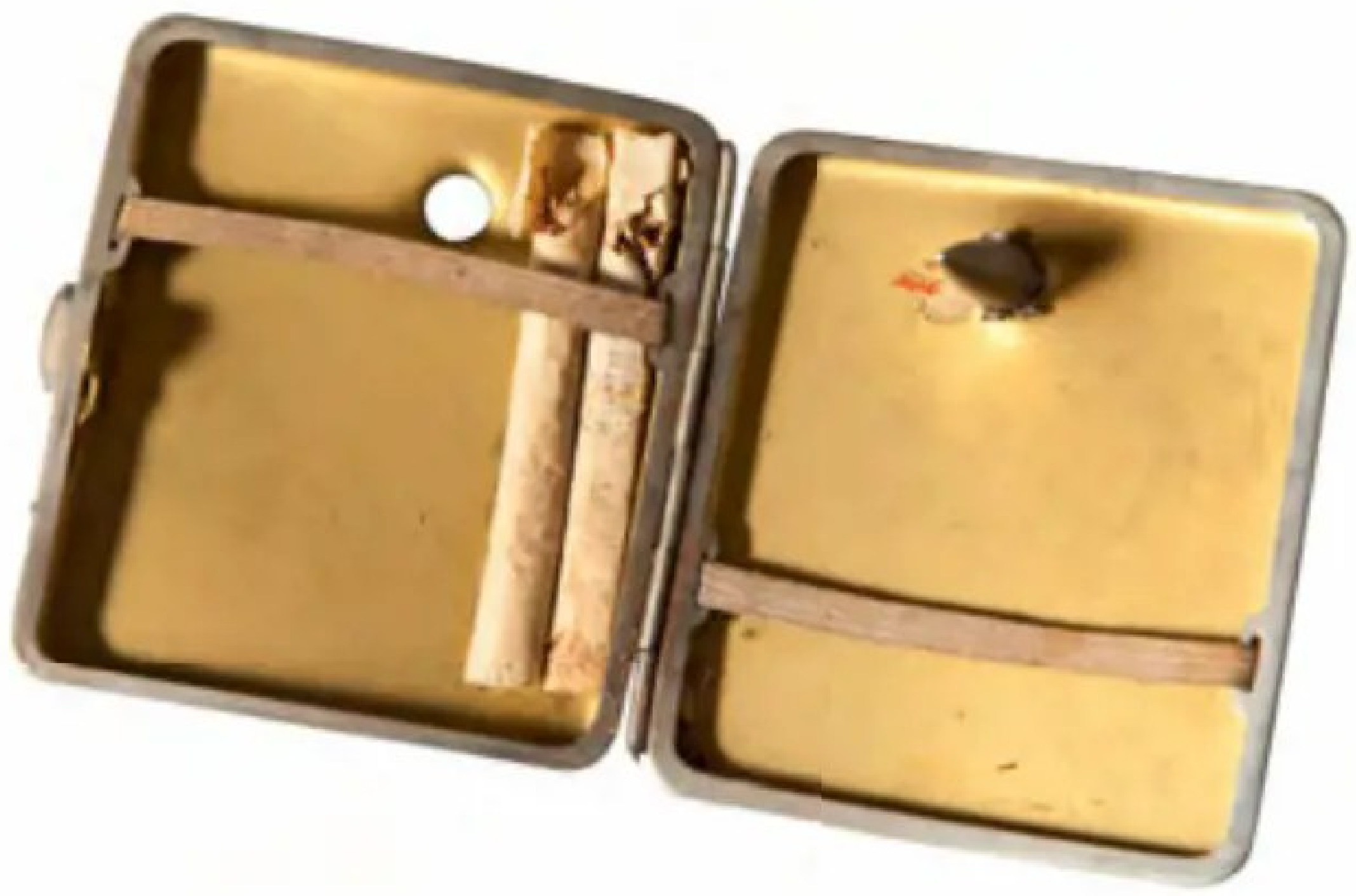
Next up is the Early History gallery which explores the Royal Fusiliers from the American War of Independence through to the end of the 19th century, touching on the Regiment's involvement in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, Crimea, and life as a soldier in the Victorian era. "Here, visitors can find the Eagle Standard of the 82nd Regiment of the French Line, captured by the Royal Fusiliers during the invasion of Martinique in 1809," curator Beth Wyrill explains. Another item to look out for is a silver wine cooler presented to the regiment by King William IV in 1836. His Majesty frequently inspected the regiment, considering them a favourite, and decreed that the Royal Fusiliers might ignore the Loyal Toast traditionally given to the sovereign, as their loyalty was beyond question.

Visitors next cross over into the Late History gallery, which covers the Boer War, the 1904 British expedition to Tibet, both World Wars, and Korea. "Look out for a soapstone carving of Buddha, brought back as a souvenir from Tibet by a Fusilier," said Beth. A series of cases explore the regiment's involvement in World War One, a time which saw the Royal Fusiliers swell to 74 battalions. Look out for a Menorah cap badge of the Jewish Legion, which comprised the 38th, 39th, 40th and 42nd Battalions, Royal Fusiliers.

In the same gallery, cases and information boards explore the regiment in North Africa and Italy in World War Two. "Here, display pieces touch on the incredible escape story of Major Gibson-Horrocks," commented Beth. "Captured by the Italians in the Western Desert, Gibson-Horrocks was aware that the Eighth Army was advancing on his POW camp, and convinced the Italian guards to flee. He then commandeered a German ambulance, drove through Axis lines unmolested, and rejoined his regiment." Another fascinating artefact is the original ceremonial uniform of King George V – the Colonel-in-Chief of the Regiment from 1900.

Moving on, the next gallery – entitled Recent History – shares the Royal Fusiliers' story in the modern age, from their amalgamation with the Royal

A soapstone carving of Buddha, brought back as a souvenir from Tibet by a Royal Fusilier



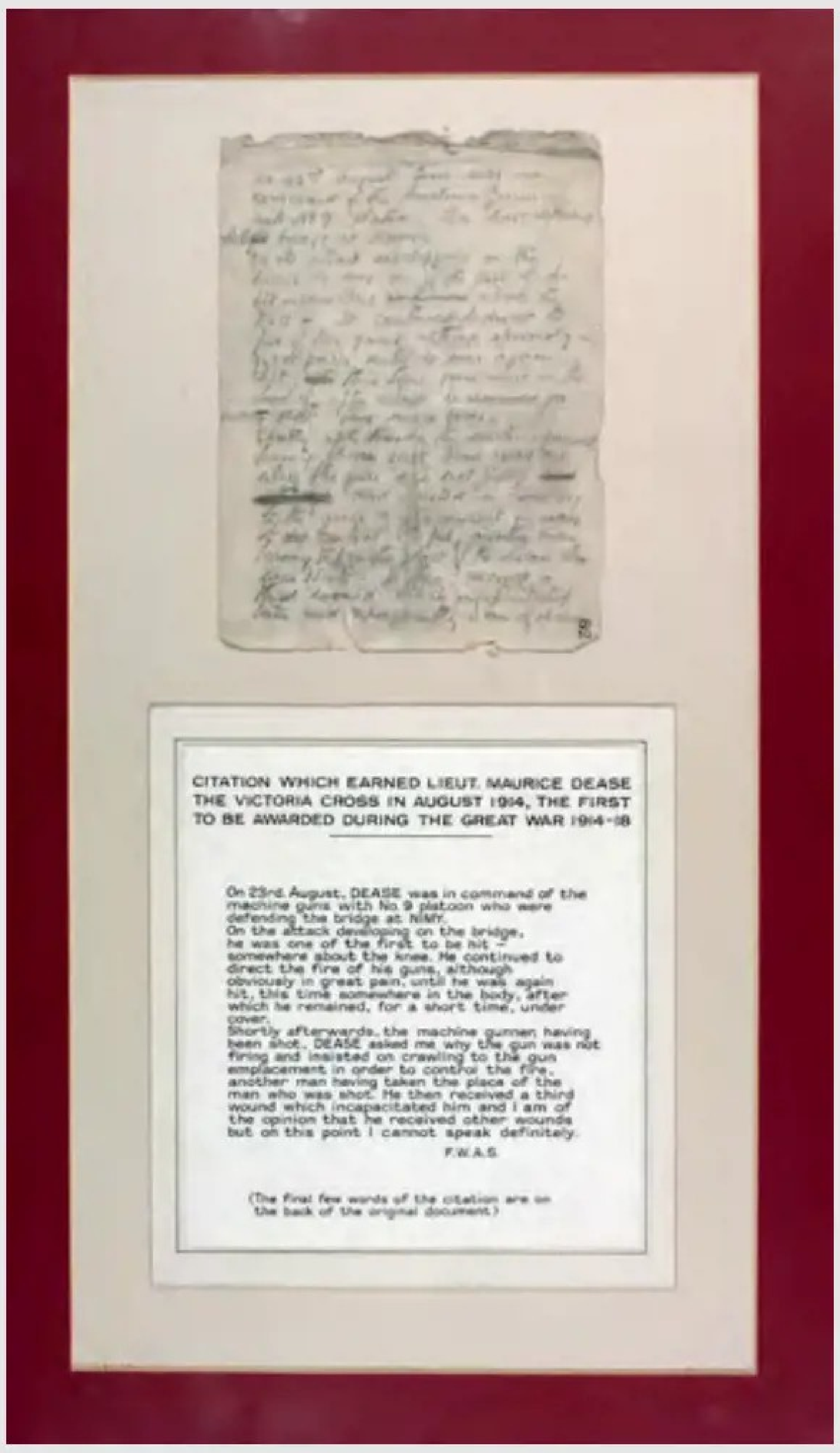
A cigarette case once belonging to a Royal Fusilier, which stopped a bullet and saved his life during World War One

An Imperial German pickelhaube in the Late History gallery

The original ceremonial uniform of King George V – the historic Colonel of the Regiment

Curator's favourite:

"I'd pick Lieutenant Maurice Deases's original Victoria Cross citation as my favourite artefact. It was written by Dease's fellow officer, Lieutenant Frederick Steele, the same day that Dease died, evidenced by the hastily written handwriting and the quality of the paper. This suggests that it was composed while the battalion was still in the process of withdrawing from the Nimy Bridge area – only possible due to Dease and Godley's heroics," said Beth.



CITATION WHICH EARNED LIEUT. MAURICE DEASE THE VICTORIA CROSS IN AUGUST 1914, THE FIRST TO BE AWARDED DURING THE GREAT WAR 1914-18

On 23rd August, DEASE was in command of the machine guns with No 9 platoon who were defending the bridge at NIMY.
On the attack developing on the bridge, he was one of the first to be hit – somewhere about the knee. He continued to direct the fire of his guns, although obviously in great pain, until he was again hit, this time somewhere in the body, after which he remained, for a short time, under cover.
Shortly afterwards, the machine gunner having been shot, DEASE asked me why the gun was not firing and insisted on crawling to the gun emplacement in order to control the fire, another man having taken the place of the man who was shot. He then received a third wound which incapacitated him and I am of the opinion that he received other wounds but on this point I cannot speak definitely.

F.W.A.S.

(The final few words of the citation are on the back of the original document.)

Curator Beth Wyrill's favourite item, Lieutenant Maurice Dease's original Victoria Cross citation

Post '68 Campaigns
Northern Ireland 1969-2007
Bosnia and Kosovo 1994-1999
Afghanistan 2001

The Recent History gallery shares the Fusiliers' story in the modern age

Northumberland, Royal Warwickshire and Lancashire Fusiliers into the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers in 1968, to Iraq and Afghanistan in the 2000s. Alongside a selection of small arms on display, including a L7 GMPG and L85 rifle, visitors can find displays relating to the regiment's service in Bosnia, Northern Ireland, and the Gulf War.

Last on the tour is the Medals Gallery. This room is dedicated to displaying the many hundreds of honours and knighthoods, gallantry decorations, campaign medals, and long service and good conduct awards accumulated by the soldiers of the regiment over its long history. Here, you'll find the aforementioned Dease VC, on show alongside eleven other examples of Britain's highest gallantry awards for valour in the face of the enemy.

All in all, The Fusilier Museum London is a compelling journey through the storied regimental military history of a significant British Army unit – one brought to life through an impressive collection of powerful tales and rare artefacts. The next time you find yourself visiting London, a trip to the Tower of London and this fascinating military museum should be at the top of your list of things to do. BW

A GPMG in the Recent History gallery

1939-1945
World War
The incredible escape of
Major Gibson-Horrocks

Information boards relate the escape story of Major Gibson-Horrocks in World War Two

Visitor information

The Fusilier Museum London is open seven days a week, 9am – 5.30pm.
Admission: Entry is included in Tower of London admission prices. Adult (18-64): £35.80, Child (5-15): £17.90, Under 5: free, Teen (16-17): £17.90, Concession (Senior, Student, Disabled): £28.50, Universal Credit: £1
Address: The Fusilier Museum London, Tower of London, London EC3N 4AB
What3words location: events.stocks.pays
Closest station: Tower Hill Underground Station (0.1 miles)
Tel: 0203 166 6912
Email: rrfmuseumlondon@thefusiliers.org
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IMAGE *of* WAR

Basking bricks

800 NAS, RAF Luqa, Malta, November 1968

Between November 11 and 16, 1968, NATO exercise Eden Apple was held in the Mediterranean. More than 50 warships participated, including Royal Navy vessels and those from the United States, Italy, Greece and France. It was a response to a build-up of 60 Soviet warships in the Med – 20 more than in the heightened tensions during the Six Day War the previous year. One of the ships central to the task force was to be the aircraft carrier HMS *Eagle*, but she had to enter drydock and 11 of her Buccaneer S.2 strike aircraft – nicknamed 'bricks' due to their robustness – deployed to Malta instead. Other British air assets included Canberras, Shackleton MR.3s, Gannet COD.4s, Victor B2/SRs and Meteor TT.20s. The presence of Soviet ships so near the task force prevented certain missions from being flown, such as the Canberra's radar jamming. Finally, while France had left NATO's military structure in 1966 (rejoining in 2009), it was invited to take part in NATO exercises.

IWM/GETTY

Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, the 1st Duke of Wellington, who presided over victory at Waterloo THOMAS LAWRENCE (ARTIST)/WELLINGTON COLLECTION, APSLEY HOUSE

> *"Napoleon has humbugged me, by God; he has gained 24-hours' march on me"*
>
> WELLINGTON, AT THE DUCHESS OF RICHMOND'S BALL

WALKING WITH WELLINGTON

John Ash and *CMV*'s **Andrew Stone** follow in the footsteps of the Iron Duke, 210 years after he ensured Napoleon met his Waterloo

For years, Waterloo was the primary destination for British visitors to Belgium, but as our host – VisitWallonia.be press officer Max Weemans – explained, things have changed. Having met us at Brussels-Midi, Max explained that Belgian tourism is still recovering from the aftereffects of COVID-19, which, with the cost of living crisis, means Britons are traveling differently, prioritising home holidays or beach breaks over the traditional battlefield tours that long dominated visits.

Nevertheless, Waterloo remains significant to Britain's intertwined history with Europe, the most famous of all battles involving its troops in three major wars not just in Wallonia, but Belgium as a whole. "There is a big interest in accommodating visitors from Britain," said Max. "There is a lot to see, especially for enthusiasts of military history. There were so many significant battles fought within Belgium's modern borders."

He described how history within Belgium is taught from a young age and that Belgians share a "duty of memory", built from a deep understanding and appreciation of the consequences produced by the conflicts fought in, by or over the nation. The result is a near-immaculate battlefield at Waterloo. However, our tour of the Waterloo campaign begins 18½ miles south, as we drive into the village of Ligny.

A village named Ligny

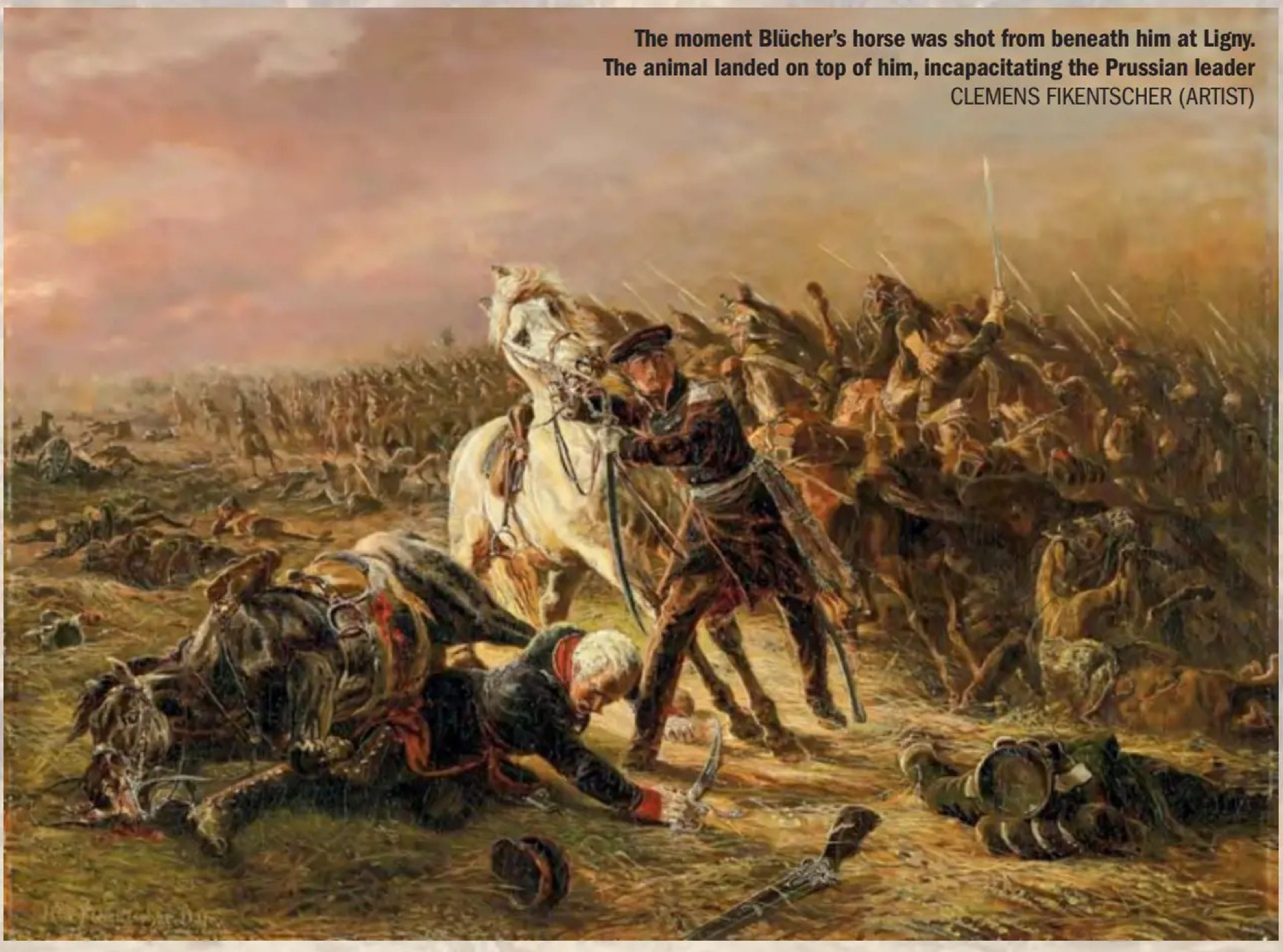
Napoleon's last victory

On June 16, 1815 – two days before Waterloo – the sound of battle consumed Wallonia at Ligny, the campaign's first action. Napoleon had advanced from Charleroi to encounter Generalfeldmarschall Gebhard von Blücher's numerically superior Prussians. Napoleon waited until he received news of battle joined at Quatre Bras before he committed to attacks on Saint-Amand. These threatened the integrity of the Prussian right, while General Jean-Baptiste Girard sent a corps into Ligny, capturing its church despite firing from three sides.

The grinding battle may have concluded sooner if not for miscommunication. The Comte d'Erlon's I Corps was marching for Quatre Bras when, on his own initiative, he turned toward Ligny. This coincided with an order from Napoleon to Marshal Michel Ney at Quatre Bras instructing d'Erlon to join him, but neither d'Erlon nor Ney received the message before I Corps came in sight of Ligny, only to be recalled by Ney.

After repulsing a counterattack, Napoleon committed his Old Guard. The Prussians fell back to the nearby heights, fending off attacks until able to implement their retreat. Blücher was incapacitated when his horse was shot and fell on top of him and his chief of staff, August von Gneisenau, co-ordinated the effective withdrawal.

Just 8½ miles away, 33,000 men led by the Duke of Wellington and William, Prince of Orange, engaged Ney's smaller



The moment Blücher's horse was shot from beneath him at Ligny. The animal landed on top of him, incapacitating the Prussian leader
CLEMENS FIKENTSCHER (ARTIST)

A display in the Ligny1815 museum showing a wounded grenadier. The staircase was rescued from a nearby building – a priest's house – that was razed in the battle ANDREW STONE

BAW's editor and Max Weemans of VisitWallonia.be talking to Ligny1815 volunteers about artefacts displayed in the Quatre Bras room ANDREW STONE

force. Having met Blücher beneath the Bussy windmill, both Allied commanders spotted the main French advance toward Ligny and Wellington agreed to assist the Prussians. The Prince of Orange's forces engaged Ney's van on June 16, with both sides were reinforced throughout the day. In the early afternoon Ney launched his main effort, but more British reinforcements arrived at 1500hrs, and Wellington assumed command upon his arrival. By 1700hrs, with the arrival of another British division, the momentum was firmly with them.

While Ney prevented him from supporting Blücher, Wellington held the field and was able to retreat to Waterloo. Crucially, the Prussians retreated to Wavre instead of Liège and, by moving in parallel with the British, communication was unbroken. Given Napoleon's attempts to keep them separated, removing Marshal Emmanuel de Grouchy and 33,000 French from the Waterloo order of battle, this proved decisive.

The Ligny1815 Museum opened in 1991 and occupies a 17th century farmhouse in the heart of the village, which was shattered by the fighting. Curator Benoît Histace beckons to us with cheerful shouts of "L'Anglais!". Much of the museum displays mannequins of uniformed troops alongside an impressive range of maps, diagrams, dioramas and weaponry. Other sections chart Belgium's route to independence, and the impact of the battle on Ligny, which took five years to recover.

Benoît steers me to a Charleville Modèle 1777-pattern musket. This and its derivatives were the standard armament of the French and also carried by some Allied troops. Shouldering it, my first thought is that it is very muzzle heavy and I wonder how performance would degrade with the fixing of a bayonet. Perhaps we overlook the musket's secondary function to fend off cavalry or shatter a breaking unit with a charge, which required a long barrel and a lengthy blade to produce reach. The barrel also had to be long to ensure the powder charge fully combusted and the ball exited the muzzle at the greatest velocity.

Though Napoleon's last victory, Ligny is seen as peripheral to Waterloo by Britons, as it involved no British forces. However, Ligny and Quatre Bras are essentially two parts of the same action. Wellington was marching to aid Blücher and the orderly retreats enabled the Prussians to join him at Waterloo. Due to this link, the museum has an exhibition exploring Quatre Bras and both it and Ligny are destinations of pre-booked tours.

Staff are most keen for visitors to see more than 300 artefacts discovered during an archaeological project that began in 1999, with which the museum is involved. As was explained to me as I am handed musket balls from Quatre Bras, the team use these finds to trace the routes of the armies, yielding interesting discoveries. By identifying each item and plotting their found locations on a map of Quatre Bras, it becomes clear how units moved. It was inevitable items would become lost or jettisoned (often with substantial velocity!) making ammunition a common find, but buttons, belt buckles, coins, clay pipes and personal effects reveal, for example, that British dragoons advanced further than believed.

Due to the makeup of Wellington's multi-national army, proportionally more British items have been discovered at Quatre Bras than at Waterloo. That said, the remarkable discovery of a mass grave at Waterloo includes the remains of a British soldier unusually buried in his uniform. One can only assume this man, whose items can be seen at Ligny1815, was so mangled by whatever struck him that it wasn't worth stripping him.

> ***"Give me night or give me Blücher"***
>
> WELLINGTON, AT THE BATTLE OF WATERLOO

La Ferme du Caillou

The emperor's restless night

Returning from Ligny, we stop at a walled farm complex alongside the road to Brussels, south of Maison du Roi. Here, at what is now the Le Dernier QG de Napoléon Museum, Napoleon spent the night in his last headquarters.

Passing through the bayonet-tipped gates reveals something surprising just around the corner. Stepping into the courtyard, there is a small brick structure with the appearance of a log store. Peering through the locked gate, we see a large pile of bones. This is the ossuary, built in 1912, where remains unearthed from Waterloo were deposited. Repeated blessings have taken place throughout its history.

The ossuary, which contains bones recovered from the nearby battlefield ANDREW STONE

The farm was destroyed after Waterloo and rebuilt. Moving into what was formerly the living room – Napoleon's quarters during his stay – with a bed positioned at one end. This did belong to the emperor, but is not thought to have been used on the eve of Waterloo. We're told he had a broken night's sleep, disturbed by his staff as they made preparations.

Thanks to a set of replica seals, we know that Napoleon expected to win, given the (unfinished) designs marking his anticipated success. French soldiers clearly also still revered him, as on display is a pocket-size statuette of Napoleon recovered from the battlefield.

After Waterloo, Napoleon's carriage was captured near Genappe. The defeated emperor escaped, but his 18k gold ring set with five diamonds, found abandoned in the sedan, became a spoil of war. It is now displayed in his Waterloo bedroom, as is an original maquette for the bronze of him placed in the courtyard of the Hôtel des Invalides in Paris. A panel reveals Napoleon's dining habits. As a man who struggled with his gut, his menu is surprising. We're told his favourite meal was a chicken fricassee (specifically chicken marengo), but the emperor's typical menu comprised "soup, a roast, three starters, two desserts, two sweets and two loaves." Those dining with Napoleon would leave hungry, as he ate little and so they were afforded eight minutes for breakfast and 12 for dinner!

In the next room, well-designed panels detail the drill for loading and firing muskets, with a Charleville-type on display. A similar installation describes the operation of a Canon de 12 Gribeauval, the heaviest French field gun of the period, which fired a 12-livre ball – a 13-pounder if you're British.

However, the centrepiece is the French Hussar's skeleton. Discovered in 1910 where the Old Guard made its last stand, it reveals damage caused by a ball to the shoulder and a sabre to the head. While complete, the skeleton was assembled from several sets of remains.

> ***"I used to say of him that his presence on the field made the difference of 40,000 men"***
>
> WELLINGTON, ON NAPOLEON, 1836

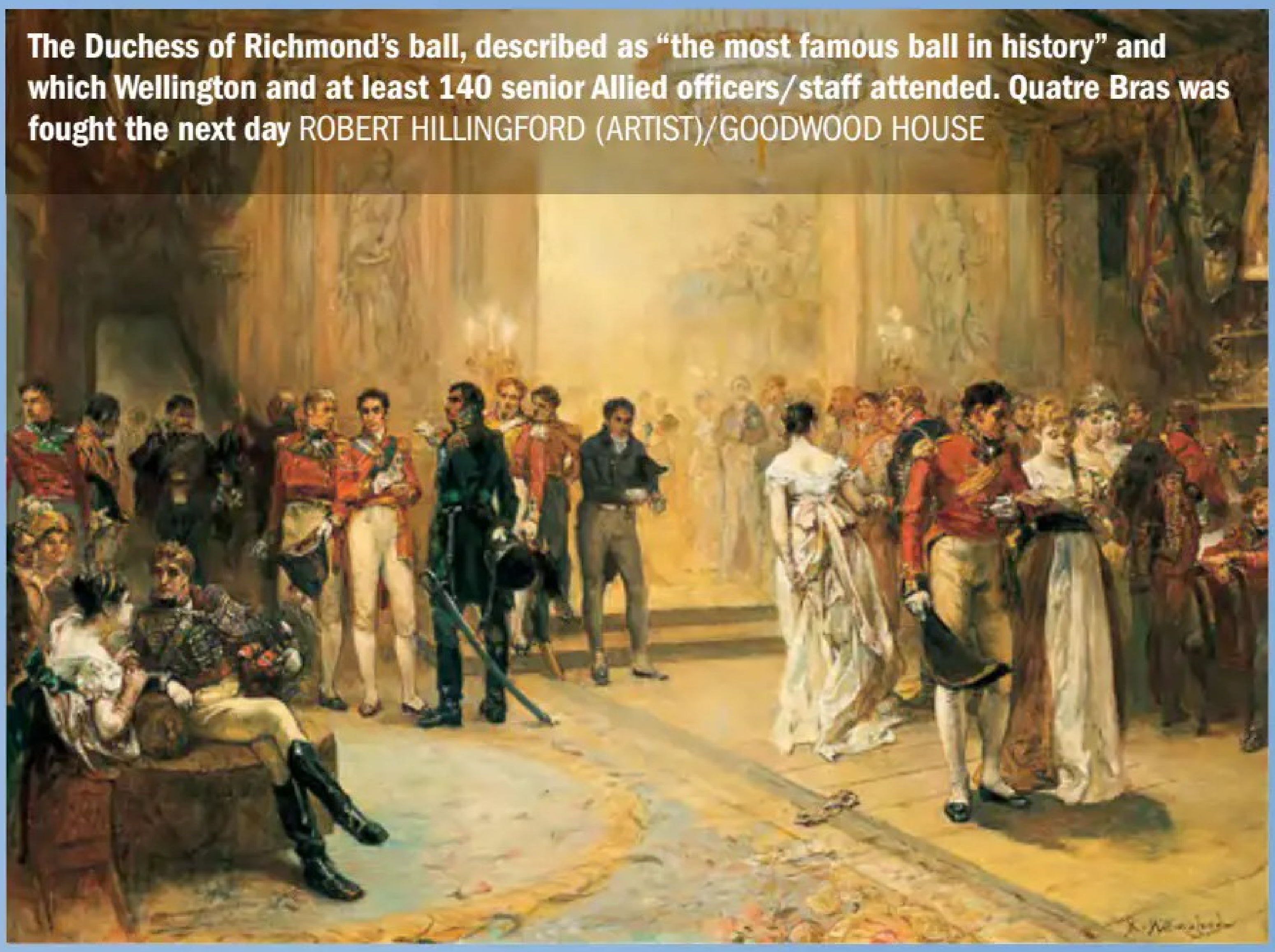
Napoleon's lost ring, captured by Prussian troops post-Waterloo and now displayed at his former headquarters JOHN ASH

La Bodenghien Inn

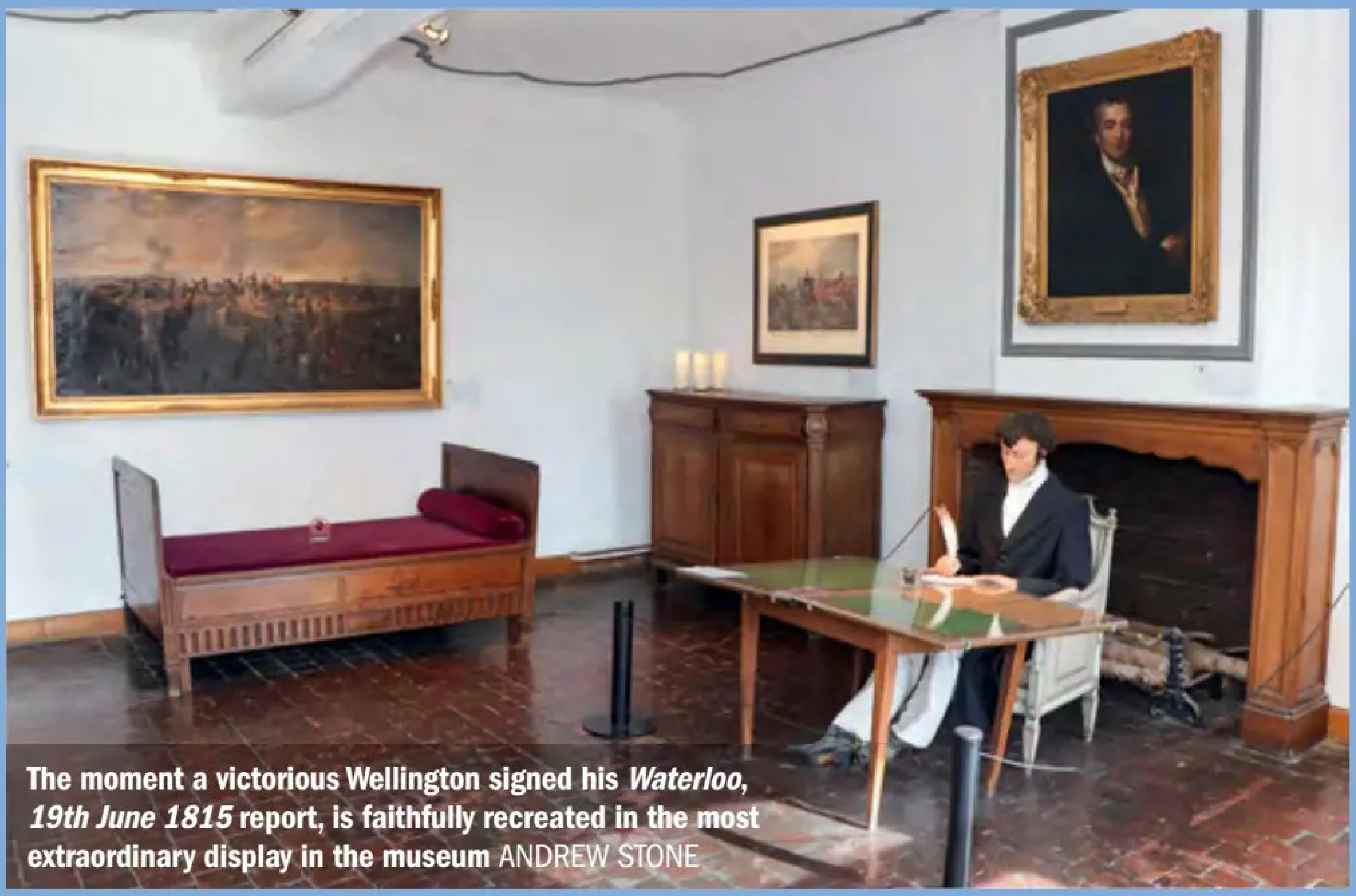
The tavern that named a battle

We rejoin the Brussels-Charleroi Road toward Waterloo and the Lion's Mound appears to our left as we follow the route Napoleon attempted, confirming that the modern road runs along the same course. Two things are striking: the importance of the Wellington's fortified outposts and the topography. We pass La Haye Sainte and Waterloo's oldest memorials:

Napoleon's last headquarters ANDREW STONE



The Duchess of Richmond's ball, described as "the most famous ball in history" and which Wellington and at least 140 senior Allied officers/staff attended. Quatre Bras was fought the next day ROBERT HILLINGFORD (ARTIST)/GOODWOOD HOUSE



The moment a victorious Wellington signed his *Waterloo, 19th June 1815* report, is faithfully recreated in the most extraordinary display in the museum ANDREW STONE

the Monument Gordon (dedicated to Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Alexander Gordon in 1817) and the Monument aux Hanovriens (dedicated to the King's German Legion in 1818). The former tops a large earthen mound, which is remarkable for reasons that will become clear.

Those expecting to see Wellington prominently represented should prepare for the opposite as Napoleon remains the 'star'. However, our next stop is Waterloo's 300-year-old Bodenghien Inn – today the Wellington Museum. This was formerly Wellington's headquarters and inside is a well-planned route with 18 main points of interest. Thanks to the sharp footsteps created by the cobblestone floors, smoothed and polished by centuries of walking, one imagines aides rushing to support the duke as he literally planned Napoleon's Waterloo.

The museum begins its story with the Duchess of Richmond's ball, held in Brussels on June 15, which Wellington attended despite the developing military situation. Displays detail the progress of the campaign, Wellington's rise as a general and Napoleon's exile to Saint Helena. Rooms are dedicated to Blücher, Earl Uxbridge and the Prince of Orange, while the narrator for the audio tour is the aforementioned Gordon, one of Wellington's aides-de-camp – you enter the room and see the bed where a wounded Gordon died overnight on June 18/19.

The Wellington room features the duke's bed, chair and folding campaign table. Here, after 17 hours in the saddle, he retired post-battle, but not before penning a letter announcing the victory. The Iron Duke had a restless night, woke after Gordon's death at 0300hrs and resumed work. By 0530hrs, he had written the eponymous report that gave this most famous battle its iconic name – the battle was actually fought between Braine-l'Alleud and Plancenoit.

> *"Bonaparte has not given me any idea of his projects, and as my plans will depend on his, how can you expect to tell me what mine are?"*
>
> WELLINGTON, TO EARL UXBRIDGE, THE NIGHT BEFORE THE BATTLE

The front facing of the former inn that housed Wellington before and after the battle ANDREW STONE

Head-quarters
Wellington Museum
1815

MEMORIAL 1815

The exterior of the subterranean Waterloo 1815 Memorial Museum PAUL HERMANS

The impressive 40 square yard scale diorama that welcomes visitors to the museum ANDREW STONE

A ridge near Waterloo

The battle that decided the fate of Europe

Time for the main event: the Waterloo 1815 Memorial Museum. We park up in a space dominated by the Lion's Mound and the large rotunda. Just behind the ridge is a restaurant, but where is the premier museum dedicated to the battle, one that welcomed 180,000 visitors in 2024?

We meet Arnaud Springuel, cultural and scientific co-ordinator, who points out a patch of ground. "The museum was there", he said, before moving about 50 yards to a wide set of grey steps leading to a two-storey structure nestled underground, built to help preserve the battle area. Descending the steps (a ramp is situated opposite) and turning into the building, the first thing that strikes you is its size. To the right is an impressive diorama. Comprising 10,000 models, this display – 30 years in the making – shows the armies prior to battle.

The first parts of the museum chart a history of Revolutionary France, featuring an interactive example of the French Republican Rural Calendar plus a guillotine. Next comes Napoleon's rise, and what better way to chart the emperor's accession than a stunning, if slightly unnerving, giant reproduction of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' 1806 painting *Napoleon on his Imperial Throne*, which shares space with other paintings charting key moments in Napoleon's campaigns.

We round a corner into a long, evocative corridor lined with two columns of life-size mannequins, each dressed in the uniform of the time and marching uphill in two lines, the French on the right. Aficionados of the era will recall Marshal Ney's promise to the Bourbon king on learning of Napoleon's escape from Elba: "I will bring him to Paris in an iron cage!" Immediately overhead is such a cage, with an eagle having freed itself from it. Side rooms leading from this installation compare the weapons on display and recreate Napoleon's pre-battle meeting with his marshals.

Wellington's Anglo-Allied army, as its name suggests, comprised men from several nations, including Spanish general Miguel Ricardo de Álava, who fought at Trafalgar on the Franco-Spanish side and observed Waterloo as part of the British force. A common theme is the multi-national makeup of his army – just 39% of Wellington's troops were British, which includes the King's German Legion, and the left column represents the Allied forces with every faction on show, and led by a Prussian vanguard. As the columns edge closer to battle, the figures adopt increasingly more martial poses.

The impact of the weather – both its delaying effect on Napoleon launching the battle, as well its slowing of the Prussian movement from Wavre – is explained

Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres' formidable 1806 depiction of Napoleon ANDREW STONE

Napoleon glowers during a conference with his marshals ANDREW STONE

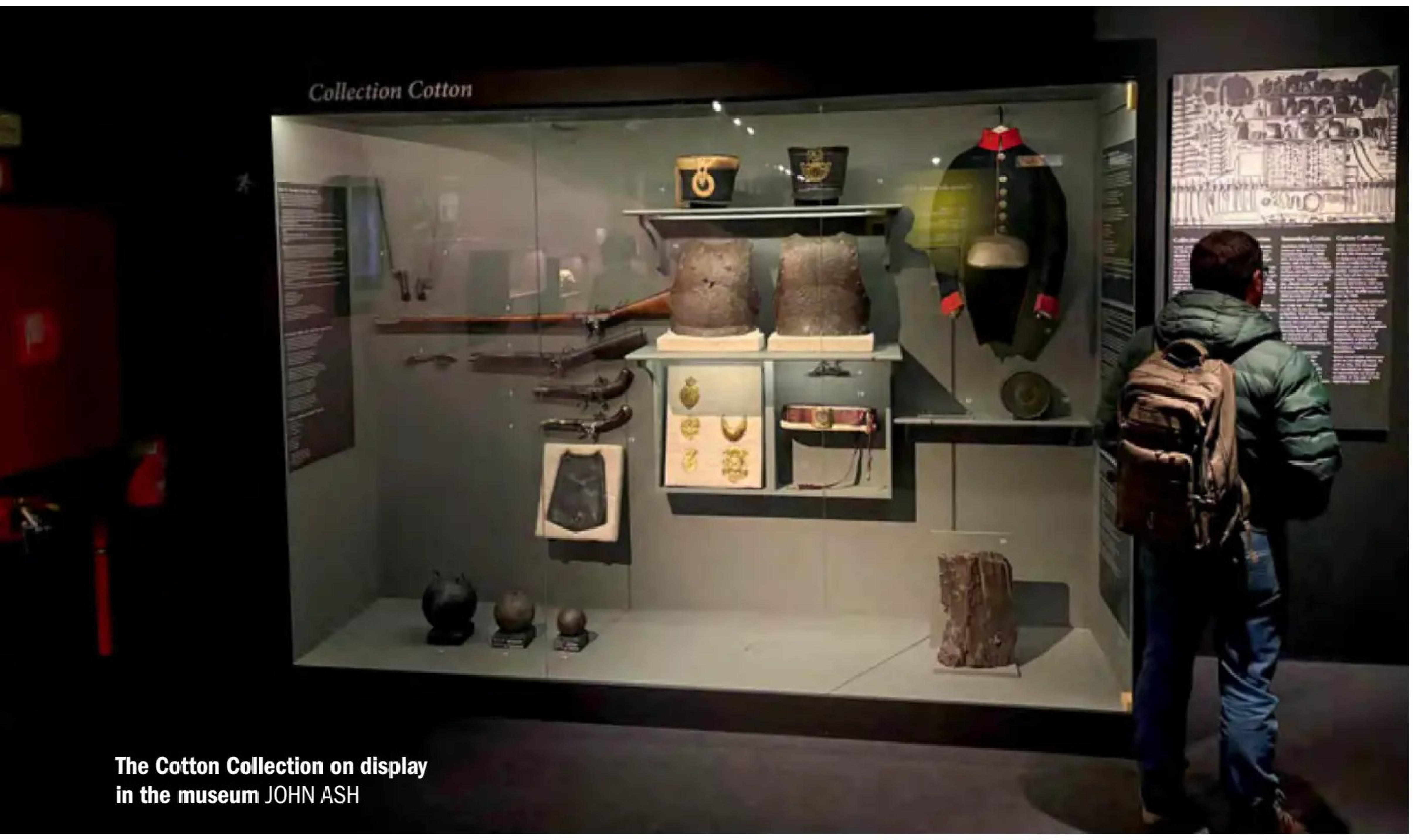
The impressive corridor in which columns from the Anglo-Allied/Prussian armies and the French troops march toward battle ANDREW STONE

next. Waterloo was fought beneath summer sun, but the stormy night prior was miserable, with few men enjoying the luxury of a tent. Then, we are treated to a cinematic experience, and I become slightly apprehensive when handed a pair of 3D glasses, aware of past disappointments. I needn't have worried. The film is about 15 minutes long and covers the key moments of the battle. Thanks to visual effects, a semi-circular screen and the use of re-enactors, the thunderous charge of cavalry rushing toward you and the firing of a line of cannon almost come to life.

We move on to an incredible find, a near-complete skeleton that escaped post-battle looting but, as his reconstructed skull suggests, not the farmer's plough. The Waterloo Soldier's remains are probably those of a Hanoverian who was found in what is now the museum's car park, with the French round that hit him. Recovered effects include pre-German coins, a metal spoon, belt buckle and folding knife. It is believed the man was being carried to the hospital at Mont-Saint-Jean when he died and was quickly buried. This may suggest he was tended to by his friends.

Finally, passing a vibrant display depicting Napoleon's flight from Waterloo and the battle's aftermath, we reach the Cotton Collection. This was assembled by Edward Cotton of the 7th Hussars, who founded the first museum dedicated to the battle. After leaving the British Army in 1826, he opened a museum at the foot of the Lion's Mound, which drew in 50,000 visitors a year by 1900. However, in the 1930s, the collection was broken up. Le Musée Royal de l'Armée de Bruxelles has since reconstituted much of this significant collection – and has appealed for the rest – with about 30 items displayed in this one-of-a-kind cabinet.

> *"They came on in the same old way, and we sent them back in the same old way"*
>
> WELLINGTON, AS PER ANDREW ROBERTS



The Cotton Collection on display in the museum JOHN ASH

***BAW*'s editor and the Waterloo 1815 Memorial Museum's Arnaud Springuel discuss The Waterloo Soldier, who was unearthed in 2012** ANDREW STONE

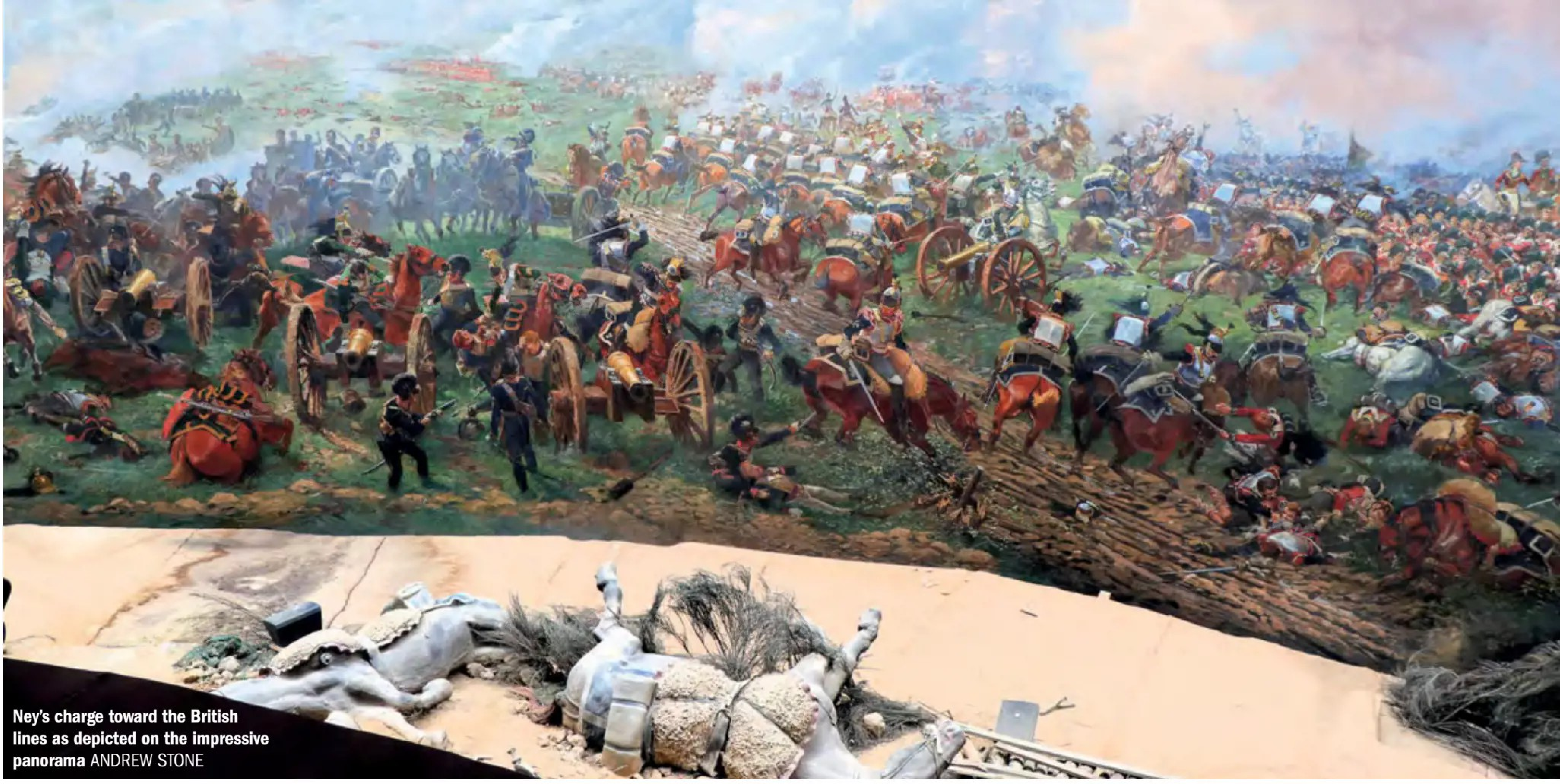
Le Panorama de la Bataille

A massive tribute in oils

Leaving the main museum, we continue underground to the rotunda and climb to the great Panorama de la Bataille and its viewing platform. We're met by the staggering sight of Ney leading his cavalry toward the British lines, and a slow walk reveals several iconic – if stylised – depictions of Waterloo in huge scale. Napoleon and Wellington both feature in the background.

The panoramic installation and original cut-outs produce convincing depth. Painted in 1912 ahead of the centenary, ten artists led by Louis Dumoulin completed the 14 oil-on-canvas panels that adorn the interior of Franz van Ophem's neoclassical rotunda. Remarkably, the 40ft tall, 360ft circumference artwork was completed in under a year. What's more impressive is that the panorama was a temporary exhibit, yet stands in all its boldness a century on.

Over the years the immersive experience has been enhanced by adding field defences and other props. A canvas topper restricts the field of view to force a cinemascope-esque perspective, and the ambient sound of battle completes the experience. It really is quite something and as we move to examine the artwork up close,


Ney's charge toward the British lines as depicted on the impressive panorama ANDREW STONE

the remnants of a small railway used to produce it are visible, as are brushstrokes of the artists.

Hougoumont

A museum within a museum, a battle within a battle

We return to the car for the short drive to Hougoumont. It's walkable, but poor weather denied our opportunity to traverse Wellington's line. Hougoumont was a working farm until 2003 and became part of the Waterloo 1815 Memorial in 2019.

It was one of three outposts about halfway between the opposing lines, and the initial diversionary attacks on it were presided over by Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, and escalated into a major action. Thanks to Arnaud, we enter a fenced-off section and walk what was Hougoumont Wood, a dense copse of chestnut trees forming the southern extent of the 'killing ground'. It was so badly damaged by the battle that it was cleared and today just three trees remain and one has fallen, although a sapling grows from its giant trunk. Immediately obvious are indentations caused by British fire – all consistently at chest height.

> *"Up, Guards, and at them again"*
>
> WELLINGTON, AS PER CAPTAIN BATTY OF THE FOOT GUARDS

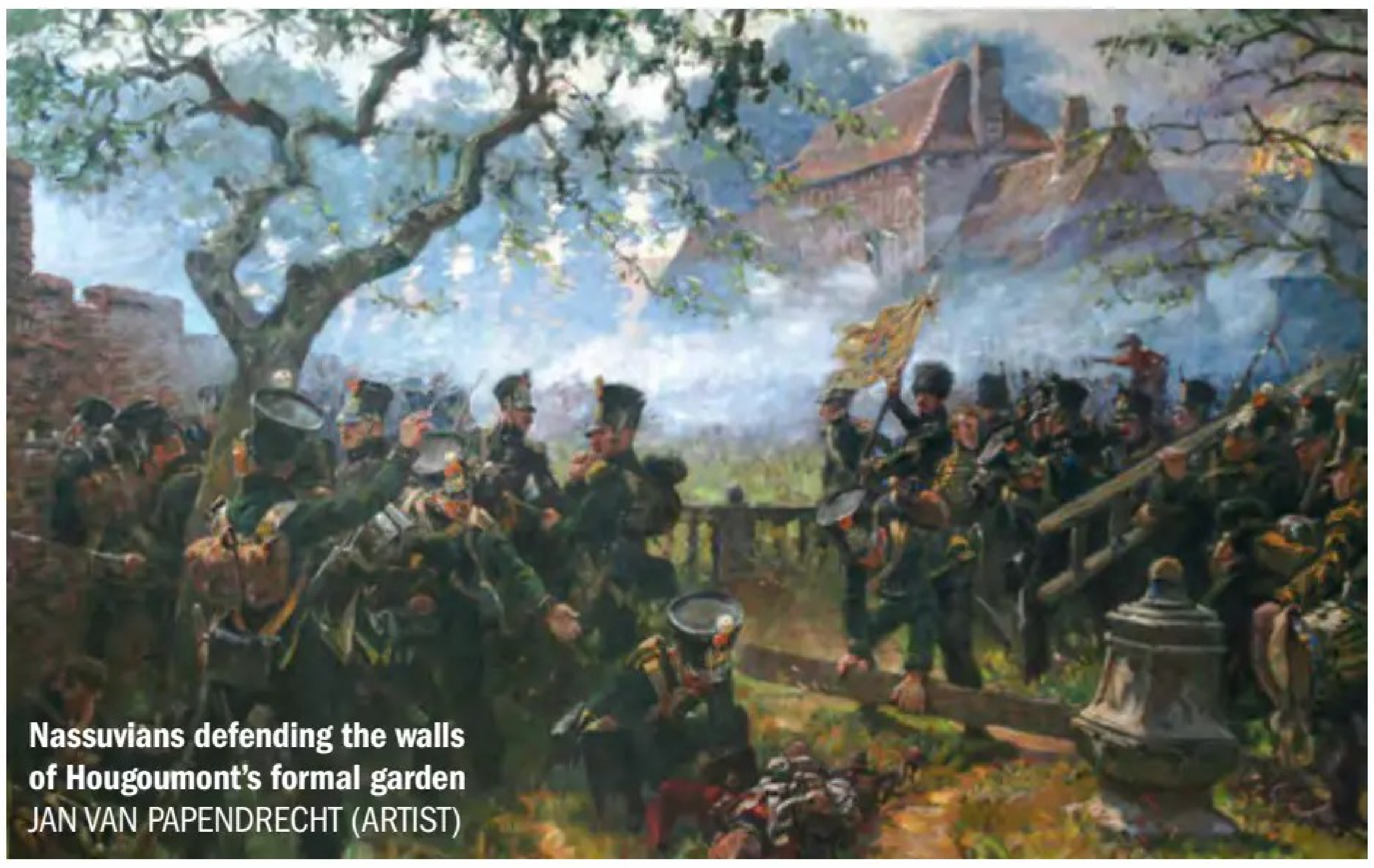
Turning to the south gate, pockmarked by French shot across its thick walls, Arnaud explains that the garrison did not fire from its windows, but from the wall flanking the path. "Did you know Field Marshal Montgomery stayed here during World War Two," he says as we pass through. Looking down the courtyard we see the north gate, unfortified and left open to enable supplies to enter during the battle. In a precarious moment, the French stormed this gate, requiring the Coldstream Guards close it – immortalised by a striking memorial. En route, we pass the well, subject of a spurious myth relating to the disposal of battle dead.

An impact from a French musket ball in Hougoumont's south wall ANDREW STONE

Peering over the east wall grants a view of the remains of the formal gardens and the former orchard. To the south, the walls continue east, the decorative embrasures joined by those roughly hewn prior to the battle. The orchard changed hands many times in a battle defined by the use of fire and manoeuvres instead of the massed ranks/volleys happening yards east. It was defended by Nassuvians and men from the 3rd Guards, who cut holes into the thick, 10ft-high border hedge to fire through.

Moving into the buildings, first is a large room in which a model of the farm, its château and gardens is in the centre, showing them prior to the battle. This room also hosts a new exhibit: a large model of the farm, wood, orchard and surrounds on which is projected an animation detailing the action in detail and in colour, accompanied by a narrative in your choice of three languages. Boards describing the key action areas complete the overview. Next, the room in which Lieutenant-Colonel James MacDonnell of the 2nd Coldstream Guards organised his defences and briefed his officers, recreated

***BAW*'s editor and Max Weemans of VisitWallonia.head toward Hougoumont's south gate** ANDREW STONE


Nassuvians defending the walls of Hougoumont's formal garden JAN VAN PAPENDRECHT (ARTIST)

Hougoumont's Jesus figure, a survivor from the blaze JOHN ASH

THE BRITISH ARMY 1815

The memorial dedicated to the Coldstream Guards, who closed the north gate ANDREW STONE

The grand barn hosts an innovative show which is projected onto large panels and the barns wall JOHN ASH

> *"Keep Hougoumont"*
>
> WELLINGTON'S INSTRUCTIONS IN CASE OF HIS INCAPACITATION

with mannequins and an audio track – "Hougoumont must not fall," the colonel demands. MacDonnell was nominated by Wellington to hold it, later branding him "the bravest man in the Army" and awarding him £1,000 (£75,800 today).

The site also features an exhibition detailing the work of Waterloo Uncovered, a remarkable charity combining archaeology and veteran support. It has discovered 4,500 finds at Hougoumont and, in 2023, by plotting musket ball finds on a map, revealed a lost footpath through the wood used by the French. Further, the concentration of British shot found at four locations in a hawthorn hedge 100 yards from the walls highlighted where the French entered the 'killing ground' and also suggested they reached the formal gardens. Excavations of a sunken road – the route Private Joeseph Brewster of the Royal Waggon Train braved to run ammunition to Hougoumont – revealed its true depth. It is now known that Brewster, while still brave, was protected by 6ft of cover – more than previously thought.

Something notable about Hougoumont is its lack of buildings. As the battle raged, the French brought howitzers within range, setting the great barn ablaze and destroying the château. The chapel – a makeshift aid station – is all that remains of the château, purportedly due to divine intervention. On its north interior wall is a life-size figure of Jesus, said to have been tickled by flame before the conflagration died away.

The great barn now hosts the small Breguet exhibit, the luxury watchmakers funded restorations at Hougoumont but the real connection is that their timepieces were carried by many high-profile figures present at Waterloo.

Hougoumont burned, but Hougoumont resisted, it was the only one of Wellington's outposts not to fall, and the great barn is the venue for a 25-minute show telling that story, which is projected onto the wall and three large moving sections. It is an eye-catching and engrossing spectacle, probably the best exhibit of its type in any museum.

Keep your eye on Hougoumont. Arnaud described plans to create a full-size representation of the château in wood and topiary while, in 2027, work should commence to restore the formal gardens and orchard, going hand-in-hand with a new interpretive space. This should ensure Hougoumont remains a focal point of British heritage at Waterloo.

The Lion's Mound

One place to view it all

More than 200 years on, the compactness of the Waterloo battlefield is noteworthy, especially considering the entirely of

The chapel, sole surviving part of the château estate ANDREW STONE

Scaling the 225 steps to the top of the Lion's Mound rewards you with an unparalleled view of the Waterloo battle area F R DR

> *"If I had lost the battle, they would have shot me"*
>
> WELLINGTON ON WHETHER THE BELGIANS HAILED HIM A HERO, AS PER SIR JOHN KEEGAN

the ground and almost every significant location associated with it can be seen from the Lion's Mound.

Waterloo has no shortage of memorials, but the most famous and certainly the most promiment is the Lion's Mound, a man-made rise built by King William I of the Netherlands on the spot where his son the Prince of Orange was wounded. Three years in building, it was completed in 1826 and topped by a large Leo Belgicus, which faces south, overlooking the battlefield, with its paw resting on a sphere symbolising the great victory. Often said to have been produced from metal sourced by melting down captured French cannon, the statue was actually made in nine cast iron sections by Liège-based ironworkers and engineers John Cockerill & Cie and assembled in situ.

Climbing the 225 steep stone steps (the 226th now covered by stabilisation works) offers an unparalleled 360° view of the Waterloo battlefield. To the north, in fair weather, can be seen Brussels, target of Napoleon's ambitions. To the east is Wavre, barely 13 miles away, from where Blücher and the Prussians came to Wellington's aid – and where Grouchy engaged the Prussian rearguard as the sound of cannon at Waterloo reverberated in the distance. The Lion's Mound is roughly in the centre of Wellington's front and to the south are the all-important trio of outposts.

You can also spot the Monument Gordon atop its mound roughly a quarter of a mile away. Now standing approximately 25ft high, when first built, the Monument Gordon was originally at ground level, but to build the 141ft Lion's Mound, 400,000 cubic yards of earth had to be scraped from the centre of the Mont-Saint-Jean ridge to La Haye Sainte to create the unenviable view of the battlefield. Arnaud explained that Wellington was displeased to see the Lion's Mound – its construction obscuring the prominence of the ridge – saying "They have altered my field of battle!" according to Victor Hugo, author of of Les *Misérables*.

Mont-Saint-Jean hôpital

6,000 lives in the hands of Allied surgeons

Our final stop is the Mont-Saint-Jean hôpital de campagne, a 1719-built farm that served as an Allied hospital behind the reverse slope that afforded Wellington's men protection.

Although 650 yards behind the lines, overshooting artillery slammed into the farm as medical personnel led by army surgeon John Gunning did their utmost to save lives during the battle and for four days after. With 6,000 wounded requiring urgent care, the hospital devolved into a grisly scene, with 500 amputations performed without anaesthesia or antibiotics – it is claimed the limbs "piled up in the four corners of the courtyard." Wellington's aides-de-camp, Colonel William Delancey and Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon, and his secretary (and nephew) FitzRoy Somerset were all patients, as was the Prince of Orange. The role of women nurses gets particular attention, and the exhibition is accompanied by a brief history of military hospitals in wartime.

> *"Believe me, nothing except a battle lost can be half so melancholy as a battle won"*
>
> WELLINGTON'S LETTER FROM WATERLOO

However, the museum is just a small part of the site owned by Anglo-Belgian landowner Anthony Martin. Restored to mark Waterloo's bicentenary, Mont-Saint-Jean is now a restaurant, distillery and microbrewery for Waterloo-brand beers, gins and whiskies, of which tours held in English can be arranged.

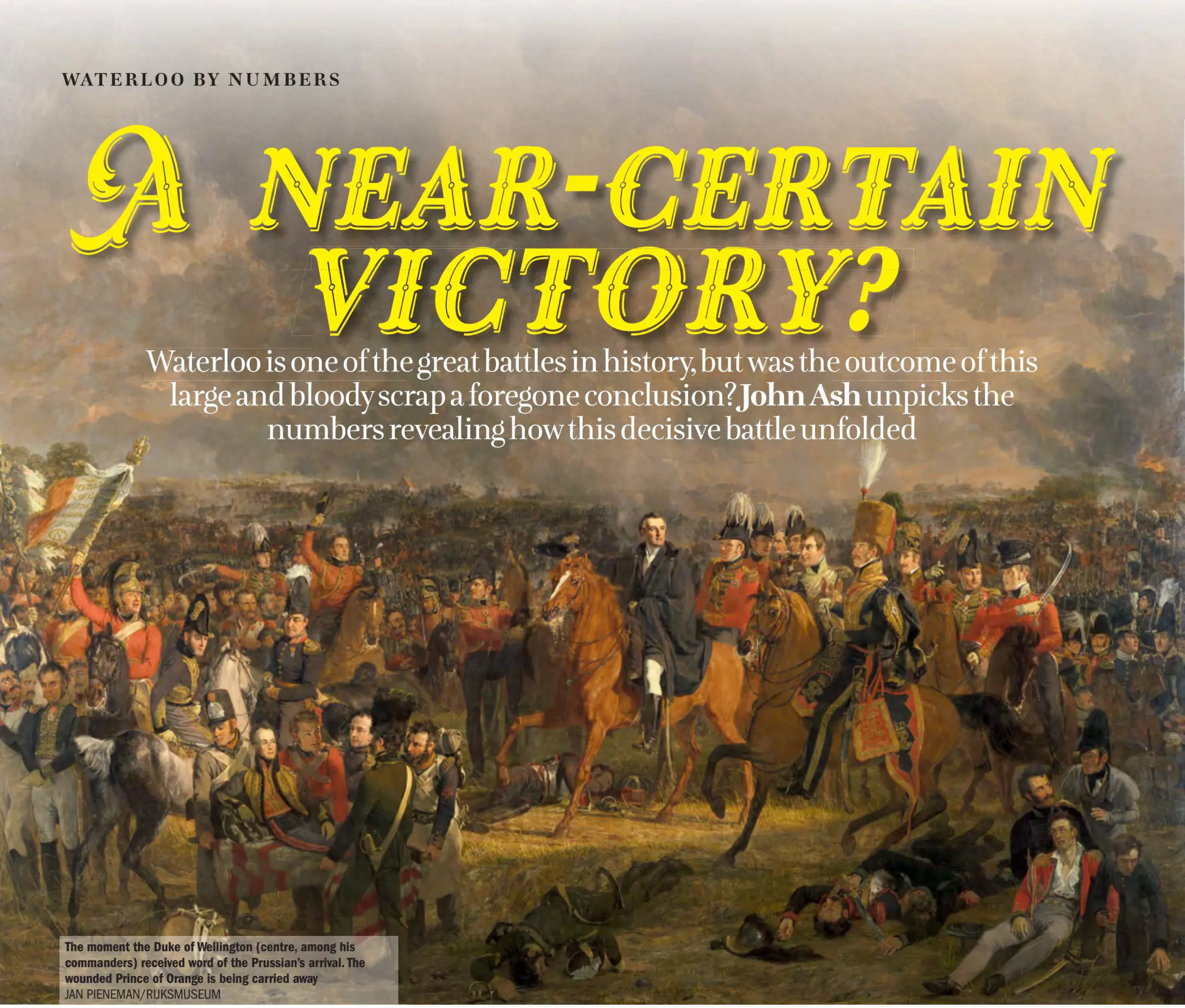
Mont-Saint-Jean also still reveals secrets, as the discovery of a proliferation of small-arms ammunition in a nearby orchard may indicate a desperate, unrecorded fight. The Iron Duke described Waterloo as "the nearest-run thing you ever saw in your life", and thanks to Waterloo Uncovered maybe we are on the cusp of learning just how close, as while these rounds may have been lost by Allied men using French muskets, the group believes they came from musketoons carried by French cavalry, indicating a breach in the line.

It might seem macabre to end your personal Waterloo campaign at a place where so many clung to life just yards away, but perhaps there is little better way to conclude by sitting where history happened, contemplating what might have been and the cost of victory, while sipping a beer brewed on that very spot. BW

The restored Mont-Saint-Jean hospital is home to a small museum dedicated to the site's role in Waterloo, as well as a microbrewery and distillery A FALISA

A NEAR-CERTAIN VICTORY?

Waterloo is one of the great battles in history, but was the outcome of this large and bloody scrap a foregone conclusion? **John Ash** unpicks the numbers revealing how this decisive battle unfolded

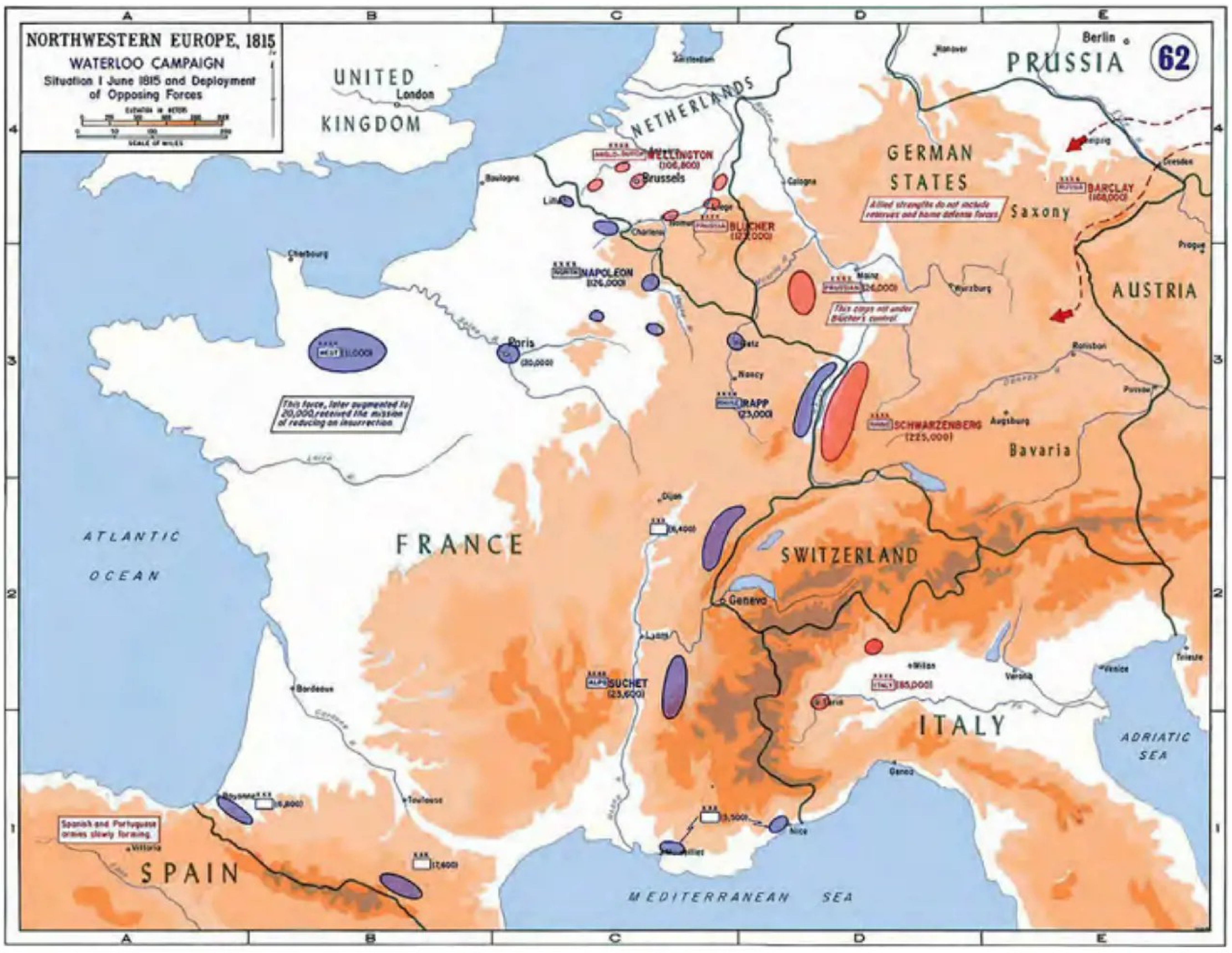


The moment the Duke of Wellington (centre, among his commanders) received word of the Prussian's arrival. The wounded Prince of Orange is being carried away
JAN PIENEMAN/RIJKSMUSEUM

ONE OF 4 CAMPAIGNS

The Battle of Waterloo saw Napoleon's Armée du Nord engage two armies led by Field Marshal Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington, and the Prussian Generalfeldmarschall Gebhard von Blücher, Prince of Wahlstatt. The presence of an Armée du Nord implies the existence of other French armies, and that is accurate, with Waterloo the deciding moment of one of several campaigns during the Hundred Days.

In all, some 250,000 French soldiers fought on four fronts against a coalition that could muster almost a million men. In addition to Napoleon's force, the Armée du Rhin was focused on Strasbourg, the Armée des Alpes was concerned with Lyon and the Armée du Jura was positioned at Belfort. At the same time, Napoleon had


NORTHWESTERN EUROPE, 1815
WATERLOO CAMPAIGN
Situation 1 June 1815 and Deployment of Opposing Forces
SCALE OF MILES
62
UNITED KINGDOM
London
NETHERLANDS
PRUSSIA
Berlin
GERMAN STATES
Saxony
AUSTRIA
Bavaria
FRANCE
SWITZERLAND
ITALY
SPAIN
ATLANTIC OCEAN
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
ADRIATIC SEA
WELLINGTON (106,000)
Brussels
BLUCHER (123,000)
NAPOLEON (126,000)
Paris (20,000)
RAPP (23,000)
SCHWARZENBERG (225,000)
BARCLAY (168,000)
SUCHET (23,600)
ITALY (85,000)
This force, later augmented to 20,000, received the mission of reducing an insurrection
Allied strengths do not include reserves and home defense forces
This corps not under Blücher's control
Spanish and Portuguese armies slowly forming
Boulogne
Lille
Charleroi
Cherbourg
Cologne
Mainz
Metz
Nancy
Wurzburg
Leipzig
Dresden
Prague
Ratisbon
Passau
Augsburg
Dijon
Geneva
Lyons
Bordeaux
Toulouse
Bayonne
Vittoria
Marseilles
Nice
Turin
Milan
Verona
Venice
Trieste
Genoa

The strategic situation facing Napoleon at the start of the Hundred Days US MILITARY ACADEMY to contend with a royalist uprising – the Armée de l'Ouest opposed the revolt in La Vendé, with troops also stationed around Toulouse, Toulon and Bordeaux facing British units supporting other royalists.

The situation for Napoleon was bleak. He'd just escaped exile, could not avoid war and was relying on delivering a pre-emptive knockout blow, hoping that would fracture those massing against him. He and his Neapolitan allies faced forces from Britain, Austria, Liechtenstein, the Netherlands, Prussia and other precursor German states, Russia, Sardinia, Switzerland and Tuscany, plus the non-military support of Spain. He committed to wars in Belgium, the Upper Rhine, Savoy and southern France.

Not to diminish the importance of the victory at Waterloo – it was the decisive battle of its age – but given what Napoleon faced it seems more likely he would have been defeated than the reverse, regardless of its outcome.

3 DAYS OF RAIN STOP PLAY

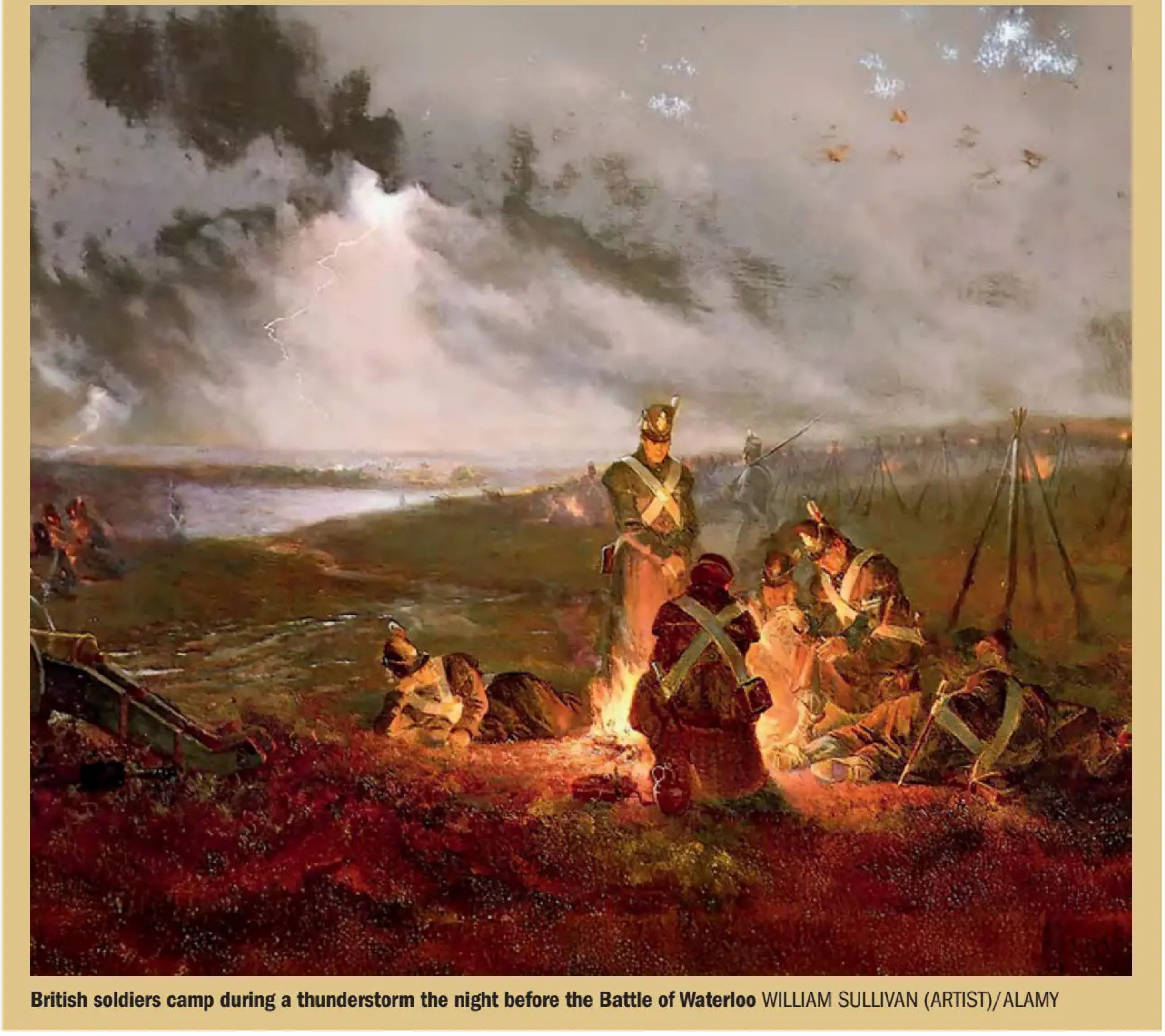
Lining his forces up about half-a-mile before Wellington's positions, Napoleon planned to begin his battle at 0900hrs on June 18, 1915. There had already been nocturnal skirmishes and the pressure was on to secure a quick and decisive victory.

Success for Napoleon required he keep the Anglo-Allied and Prussian armies separate. Having defeated Blücher at the Battle of Ligny on June 16, he sent 33,000 men to pursue them and keep them at bay. Meanwhile, he committed 72,000 men to defeating the British. Also on June 16, a 20,000-strong French force was held at Quatre Bras, barely a few miles from Ligny, by Wellington. However, the Prussian defeat meant Wellington also had to retreat or risk being outflanked.

Napoleon did not realise that the Prussians were in good shape, able to reorganise quickly, and communicating with the British. When Wellington decided to make a stand, it was agreed Blücher would move to join him. Time was of the essence, but Napoleon was forced to delay his actions owing to the wet ground – a result of three days of heavy, but sporadic, storms.

While Wellington's forces, on a battlefield of his choosing, endured a miserable and soggy night, the French struggled deploy their forces. By 0900hrs, many of Napoleon's field guns were still out of position and could not be moved or fired, while his cavalry could not advance at speed, and his infantry was churning the ground into a muddy quagmire.

At 1130hrs, Napoleon deemed the ground dry enough to proceed. His guns opened fire and his troops advanced, but the wet conditions still had a part to play, absorbing shot and slowing movement. Ultimately, there was a delay of about four hours before Napoleon sprung his main attack –soon after which the Prussians were beginning to reach the battlefield.



British soldiers camp during a thunderstorm the night before the Battle of Waterloo WILLIAM SULLIVAN (ARTIST)/ALAMY

MORE THAN 9,000,000 SHOTS FIRED

Some 200,000 soldiers from at least seven nations/states fought at Waterloo and the amount of ammunition expended was huge, with at least 9,000,000 musket rounds fired. Several British regiments reported ammunition shortages, with some, including the King's German Legion, exhausting supplies. The memoirs and recollections of several British solders note them running out of ammunition. Arguably, the replenishment was as important to the outcome of the battle as Blücher's timely reinforcement.

The typical redcoat marched into battle with 30 rounds of pre-made ammunition: comprising paper cartridge, ball and powder charge, and he was able to fire three rounds a minute. The French soldier typically fired twice in a minute, and carried an initial 35 rounds.

Replenishing ammunition was vital to any lengthy engagement – and Wellington had the additional problems created by fact the Brown Bess musket was only standard within British units, with the Allied contingents using a mix of firearms, including French and Prussian muskets. The issue of some 3,000-4,000 rifles such as the Baker, which used smaller calibres than the Brown Bess, also complicated logistics.

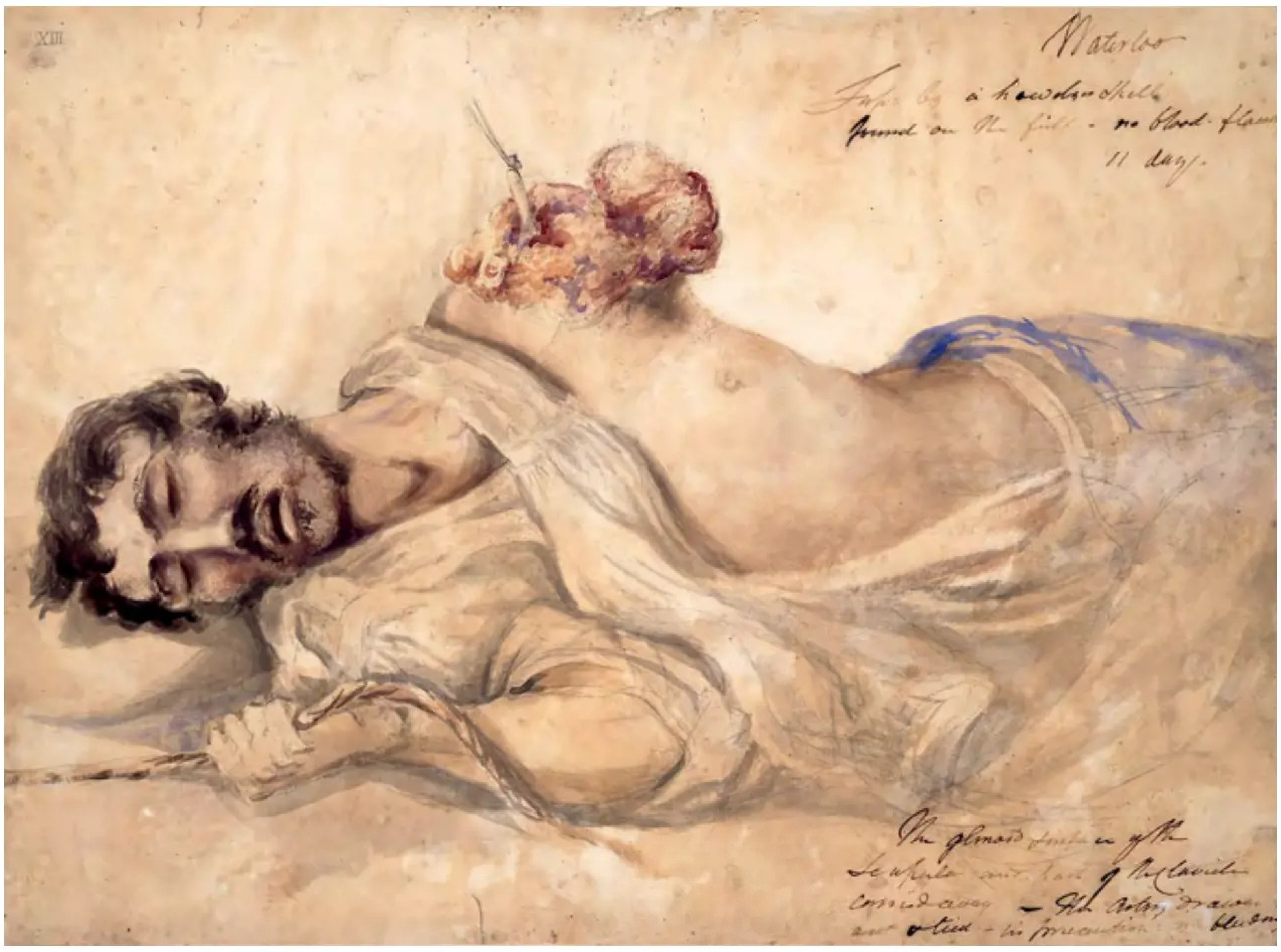
The situation for the artillery was different. Although some 42,000 cannonballs and shells were fired from guns and howitzers during the battle and logistical mismanagement slowed down resupply, few batteries ran out of ammunition. According to historian Michael Clodfelter, the Allied artillery fired 21,500 rounds, inflicting 14,000 casualties, while the numerically superior French guns fired 21,000 rounds, resulting in 13,300 casualties – the Allies were partially sheltered from the French bombardment by Wellington's positioning of his forces on a reverse slope.

3 SQUARE MILES OF HELL

Despite its size, Waterloo ranks only as the fourth largest battle of the Napoleonic Wars. However, in terms of casualties sustained, it is second only to the September 1812 Battle of Borodino. Moreover, the Waterloo battlefield was surprisingly small – only about three square miles – making it a close affair. Retired surgeon Mick Crumplin, curator and archivist at the Royal College of Surgeons, offers a stunning statistic: British losses per square mile exceeded those suffered by them on the First Day of the Somme in 1916.

After nine hours of fighting, some 24,000 Allied troops had been killed or wounded. The French lost 25,000 killed or wounded, with 8,000 captured. Some 12,000 horses also died. On average, there were 97.6 corpses (human or equine) for every acre, although some areas saw heavier fighting, with witnesses recalling 'carpets' of bodies.

Equally prominent in accounts is the strong stench gripping the battlefield into the evening. It took two days to clear the Allied wounded and five to move the French. Every nearby building became a makeshift hospital, and mercy killings and suicides were not uncommon. Physicians from as far as Britain travelled to help treat the wounded.



The grizzly depiction of a British soldier wounded by cannon shot at Waterloo, drawn by surgeon Charles Bell, who travelled from London to Brussels to help treat the wounded. According to Bell's papers, the man survived his wounds WELLCOME LIBRARY

Napoleonic weaponry was efficient at causing massive trauma injuries, with large-calibre musket balls made from soft metals often deforming on impact, shattering bones, organs and causing huge cavities. Cannonballs tore limbs from soldiers or the innards from horses – with accounts describing wounded equines running around in such a state or attempting to feed with shot-away faces, until they collapsed from exhaustion and blood loss. Bayonets and lances inflicted deep penetrating wounds that were difficult to treat, and while a good slash from a cavalry sabre would sever a limb – a bad, but treatable, injury – glancing blows tended to rip and tear, leaving gaping wounds. Battlefield surgeons did their best against the clock but lacked the means to effectively clean wounds and contended with rapidly blunting instruments. Rank afforded no improvement to standards of care, and the shock of an operation or amputation without anaesthetic was enough to finish off a weakened soldier whether a colonel or a corporal.

Then came the looters and trophy hunters. Many a fallen soldier was stripped by plunderers of their personal effects, blankets, equipment, clothes and boots. Sometimes the wounded were finished off, but often fingers were simply severed to remove rings, and teeth – both gold and real – were ripped out from men still writhing in agony. Teeth in particular were highly saleable items and the term 'Waterloo teeth' became commonly associated with dentures.

THE END OF 23 YEARS OF WAR

The Napoleonic Wars had a pronounced effect on Europe, and despite advances in medicine, the series of conflicts resulted in millions of military and civilian deaths. Indeed, according to Mick Crumplin, the effect on populations was proportionally worse than World War One.

While estimates vary, overall some 2.5-3% of the European population is believed to have died, with Britain losing 220,000-311,000 soldiers and sailors, about 1.2-1.8% of its population. Almost a million Russians were killed and more than a million Austrians, as were 580,000 Spaniards, 402,000 Prussians, 250,000 Portuguese and 120,000 precursor Italians. Estimates of total coalition/allied war dead during the conflicts range from 2.3m to 6m.

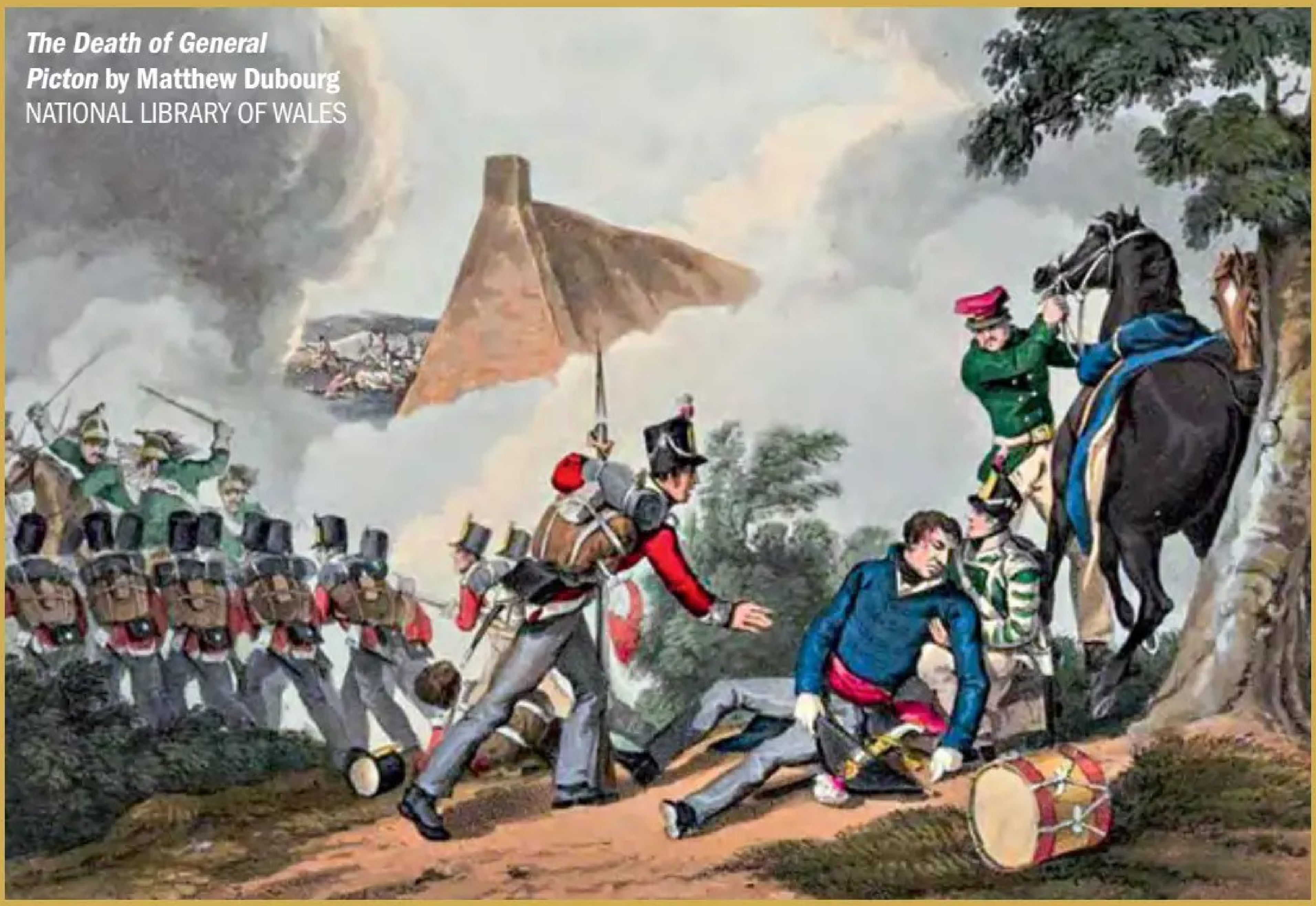
France sustained 305,000 dead on the battlefields of Europe, Africa and in the New World, but a lethal combination of weather, disease and combat cost France and its allies dearly, with some 1,800,000 dead overall – more than half being French. Civilian deaths range from 750,000 to 3m, with one estimate suggesting a million French civilians died at home or in rebellious colonies.

The impact on French society was huge, with their leadership toppled twice in a short period, all with the shadow of the revolution in recent memory. After Waterloo and the Treaty of Paris, France was under incredible financial strain, forced to pay a staggering 2,000,000,000 francs indemnity in reparations.

Napoleon had also given up ambitions of a French Empire in the Americas, losing Haiti to rebellion and selling territories – some 830,000 square miles – to the United States in the 1803 Louisiana Purchase Reputedly, prior to the wars, the ratio of men to women in France was about even, but by the time of Napoleon's second exile this had dropped to .86 men for every Frenchwoman.

Battle and atrocities were the obvious killers, but also the smallest – more people died from disease, deprivation and climate than from hostile fire.

2 GENERALS SLAIN – AND A BIZARRE MONUMENT


The Death of General Picton by Matthew Dubourg
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF WALES

High-profile casualties at Waterloo include Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Picton, commander of the British 5th Division. The National Army Museum has the musket ball that killed Picton in its collection, noting it is deformed where it struck his skull. The ball was likely fired from a Charleville musket at close range at around 1330hrs, hitting the general's right temple.

Picton had launched a bayonet charge to repulse the Comte d'Erlon's Corps at the centre of the British line, his last words apparently being "Charge! Charge! Hurrah! Hurrah!" It was later discovered that Picton had been carrying a gunshot wound from the Quatre-Bras, days earlier. He had apparently not told anyone of the injury to his hip and treated it himself.

Henry Paget, Earl of Uxbridge and later the 1st Marquess of Anglesey, had his right leg shattered by cannon fire. The commander of the British cavalry was close to Wellington when he was hit. After looking down, he is credited with stating "By God, sir, I've lost my leg!" – or words to that effect – to which Wellington replied "By God, sir, so you have!" His leg was amputated and the limb was buried by local man as a shrine that became a tourist attraction until the late 1870s, when a storm unearthed the remains.

The commander of the Union Brigade, Major-General Sir William Ponsonby, was killed by lancers when his brigade overextended in a charge against d'Erlon's corps.

Future field marshal FitzRoy James Somerset (Baron Raglan), lost his right arm at Waterloo. He later commanded British troops in Crimean.

William, Prince of Orange, later King William II of the Netherlands, was shot in the left shoulder as he led I Allied Corps.

No high-profile French officers were casualties at Waterloo, but many faced reprisals and, in Marshal Ney's case, execution, at the hands of restored royalists in the Second White Terror.

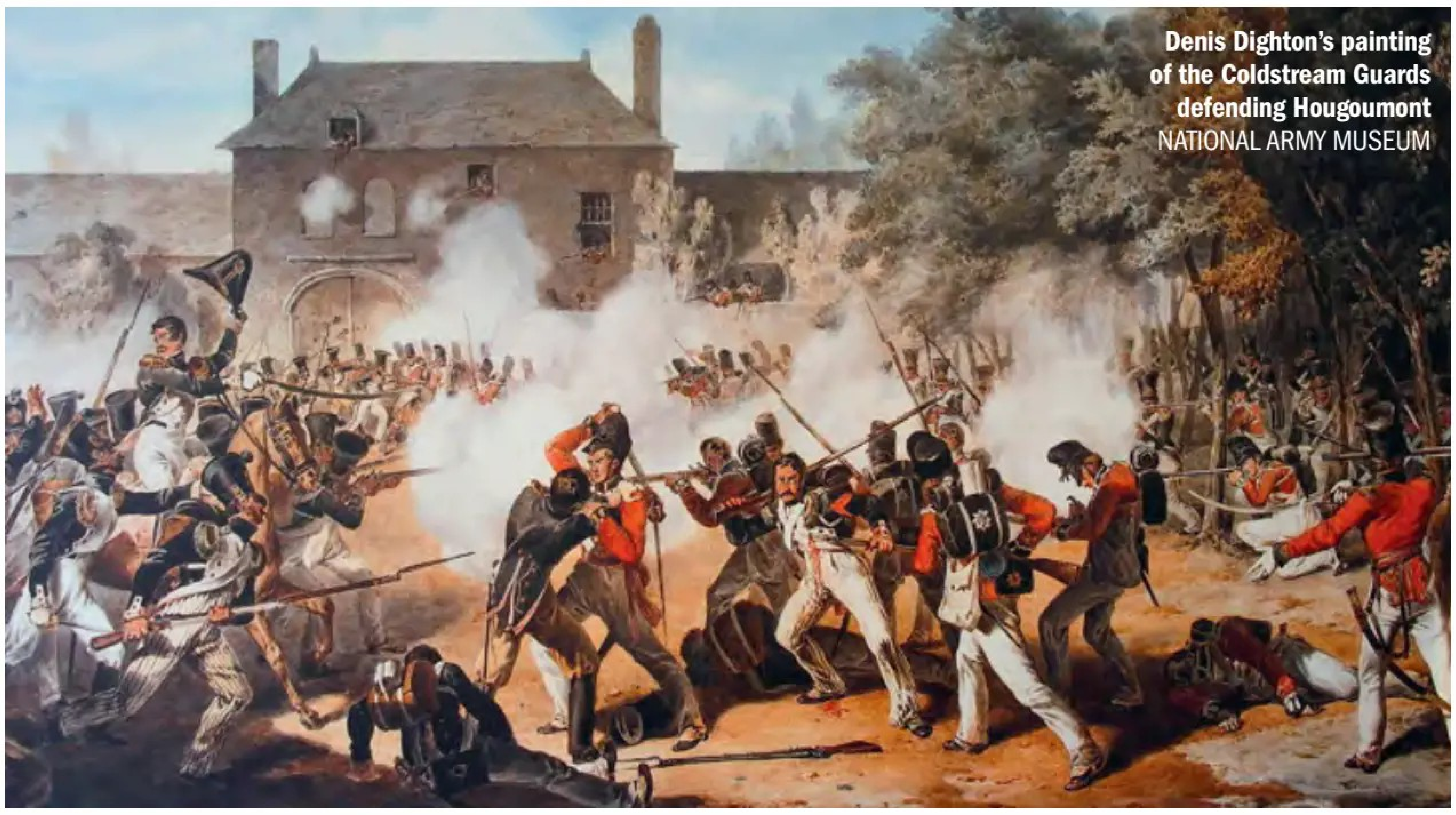
1 CRUCIAL COMMAND DECISION

Wellington's selection of Waterloo as the place where he would make his stand proved vital to the outcome of the battle. However, he did not pick the battlefield as he retreated from the Battle of Quatre Bras, instead having pre-selected the location a year before, examining the site in summer 1814 – nine months before he arrived in Brussels to command the Anglo-Allied force and 12 months before the battle.

Waterloo offered a strong defensive position, which was important to Wellington as his 68,000 men and 156 guns were not only outnumbered, but outpowered. Unlike the French, his force also spoke several languages. While Allied units included hardened veterans, they varied in quality and experience overall – whereas Napoleon's forces comprised loyalists, with the presence of Napoleon himself bolstering resolve.

Expecting the Prussians to arrive to his left and support him – finally giving Wellington the numerical advantage – he concentrated his forces along a two-and-a-half-mile front, deploying them across the Mont-Saint-Jean Ridge. With the bulk of his troops drawn up in his centre, on his right and on the reverse slope, they would be mostly sheltered from the more numerous French guns. Meanwhile, Wellington's gun-line, light infantry and some line infantry crested the ridge, while three garrisons were deployed in three strategically important outposts: Coldstream and Grenadier Guardsmen and Nassau/Hanoverian infantry at the Hougoumont estate, the King's German Legion and the 95th Rifles at La Haye Sainte farmhouse and more troops from the Duchy of Nassau at the farm of Papelotte. These garrisons would disrupt the French assault and draw in disproportionally large numbers of French troops. Hougoumont, in particular, was the target of a French diversionary attack aimed at luring the British to that flank but ended up absorbing ever-larger numbers of French troops.

The cover and concealment provided by the ridge, plus the fortified outposts, furnished Wellington with a formidable advantage. However, that alone would not be enough: Waterloo had to be fought – and fought well.


Denis Dighton's painting of the Coldstream Guards defending Hougoumont
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LAUGH OR FLY

PART I: UP, UP AND AWAY

Words: **Peter Hart and Gary Bain**

It was the new craze gripping the nation, but even in this pioneering time of fledgling military aviation, the aeroplane and the airship had the power to humble generals

The birth of British powered flight. Samual Cody stands ahead of the British Army Aeroplane No.1, the machine which he built in 1907 CHRONICLE/ALAMY

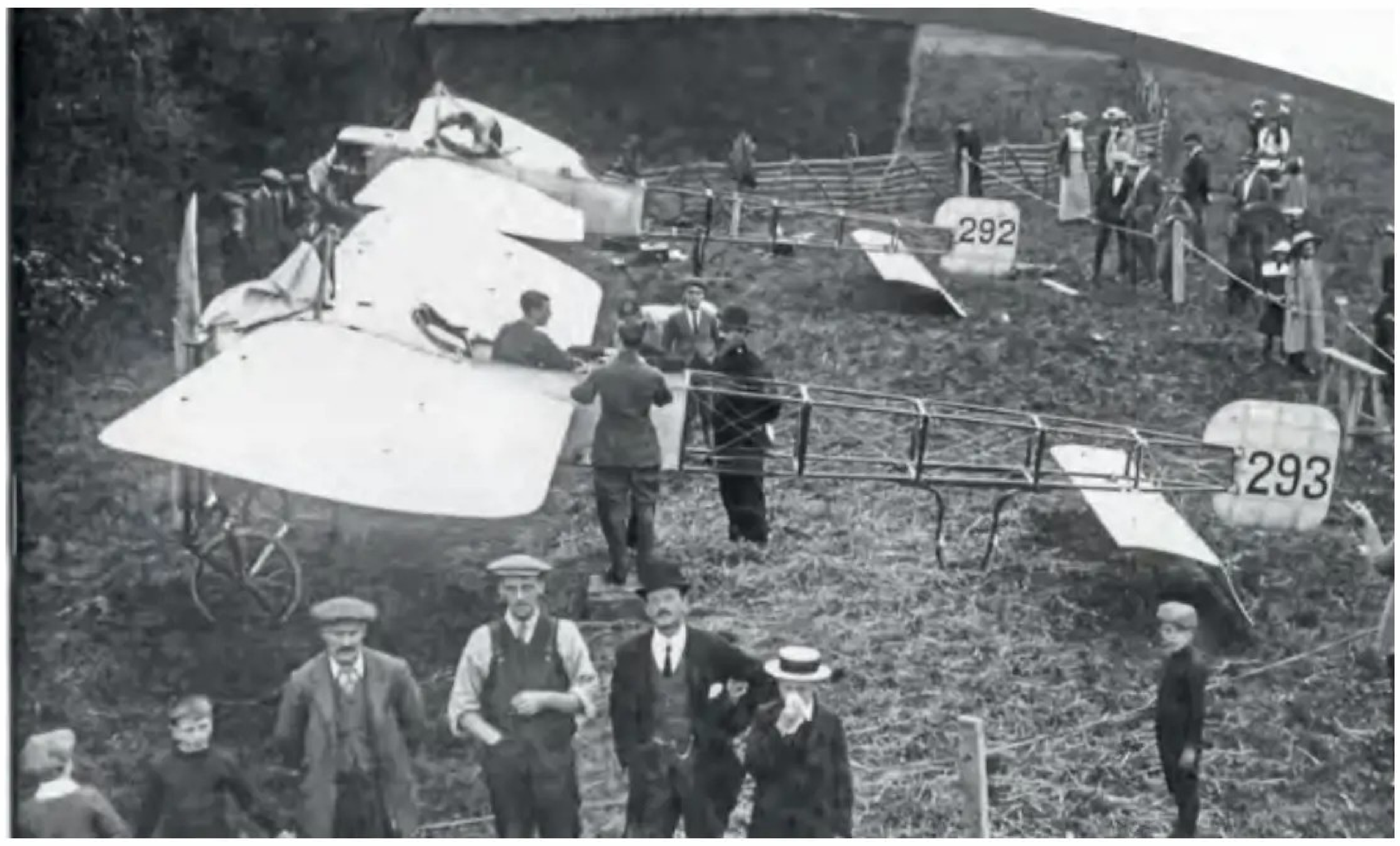
In December 1903, in far off America, brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright began a series of powered flights that would change the face of warfare. Gradually short hops became proper flights of several miles as they explored the capabilities of the eponymous Wright Biplane. News began to spread, and reactions were varied. Some saw the potential early on, but the featherweight and underpowered aircraft looked impractical as a weapon of war and even the greatest of pre-war theorists struggled at first to grasp what lay ahead.

Among the sceptics was General Ferdinand Foch, then at the École Supérieure de Guerre and later supreme commander of Allied forces on the Western Front: "Aviation is fine as sport. I even wish officers would practice the sport, as it accustoms them to risk. But, as an instrument of war, it is worthless."

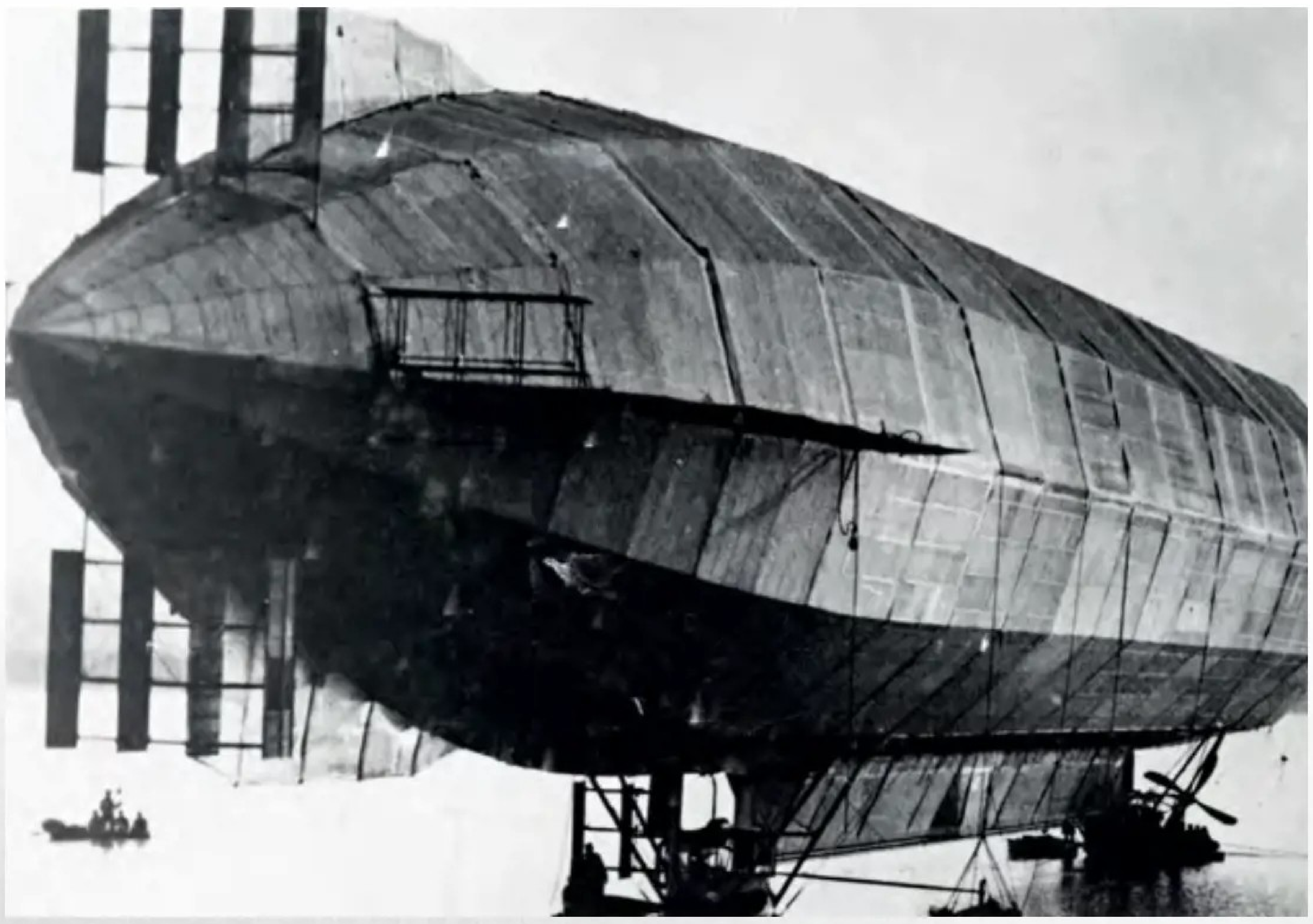
He – and many others – were to be proved wrong.

As the pioneers of the air began to multiply around the world, some visionaries were becoming seriously worried. Thus, prolific author H G Wells, the famous purveyor of futuristic fiction, vigorously expressed his fears in – where else – the *Daily Mail*, the most popular British newspaper of the day:

> *"Aviation is fine as sport. I even wish officers would practice the sport, but as an instrument of war, it is worthless"*
>
> General Ferdinand Foch



LEFT: **Two Bleriot IXs of 3 Squadron at Wantage, September 1913**
VIA ANDREW THOMAS



LEFT: **The ill-fated HMA Airship No.1 'Mayfly', a Vickers-built aerial scout that was also Britain's first rigid airship. It never flew, as it was wrecked in 1911**
VIA ANDREW THOMAS

"This foreigner-invented, foreigner-built, foreigner-steered thing, puts the case dramatically. Within a year we shall have – or rather they will have – aeroplanes capable of starting from Calais circling over London, dropping a hundredweight or so of explosive upon the printing machines of the *Daily Mail* and returning securely to Calais for another similar parcel."

There was outcry, and the military scrambled to catch up any ground they had lost in the endless armaments race with foreign powers. As well as the prospects of aircraft, there was a good deal of investment in airships, following the example of the German Zeppelins.

For the British, the tortuous work of designing and constructing their own giant airship – the Royal Navy's HMA No.1 – commenced in 1909. At last, in 1911, she was complete. It was certainly huge – 512ft long and 48ft in diameter, with a vast gasbag capacity of 700,000ft^3. She was soon christened *Mayfly*, which proved all too appropriate – she may fly, and she may not. She did not and broke her back while tied to her mooring mast, and she was written off as an expensive failure.

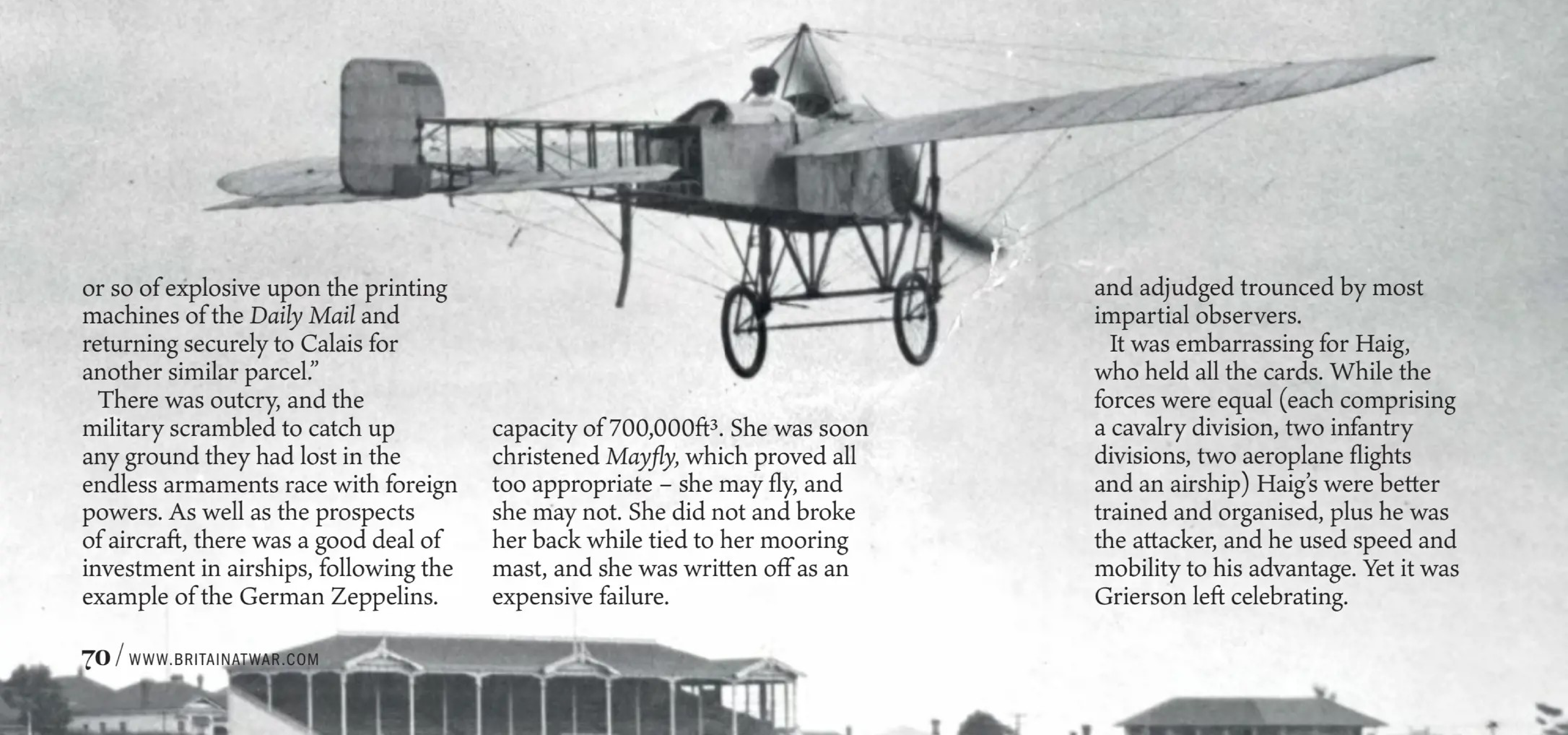
Peering over the horizon

The army was also developing an interest in aviation. The restricted load capacity of aircraft meant visions of bombing and machine guns raining death from the sky were premature, but the value of aerial reconnaissance was obvious, offering as it did the chance to see beyond the far horizon. The generals were not blind to the attractions of knowing what their enemies were up to.

In 1912 there was a further reorganisation as the Air Battalion mutated into the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) which was intended to have military and naval wings, backed up by a Central Flying School at Upavon. The Senior Service was having none of that, and by July 1914 the naval wing had gained formal independence as the Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS), which began to coalesce around the Naval Flying School at Eastchurch, Kent. A series of trials began to identify those aeroplanes best suited to military service, while the RNAS also experimented with seaplanes capable of landing on and taking off from water.

The gradual progress of military aviation was demonstrated in large field exercises held across East Anglia in autumn 1912, with airships and aeroplanes deployed by both sides, with the invading Red Force (commanded by Lieutenant-General Sir Douglas Haig), facing Blue Force (Lieutenant-General Sir James Grierson). Both generals were aware of the potential value of aerial reconnaissance, but Haig's aviators failed to locate one of Grierson's divisions and as a direct result he was surprised by a counterattack and adjudged trounced by most impartial observers.

It was embarrassing for Haig, who held all the cards. While the forces were equal (each comprising a cavalry division, two infantry divisions, two aeroplane flights and an airship) Haig's were better trained and organised, plus he was the attacker, and he used speed and mobility to his advantage. Yet it was Grierson left celebrating.



BELOW: **A Bleriot monoplane flying over Epsom racecourse**
VIA ANDREW THOMAS

ABOVE: **Prospective Royal Flying Corps personnel get their first introduction to service life and army flying in a lecture hall at Oxford University** PICTORIAL PRESS/ALAMY

> *"The first step in war will be to get rid of the hostile aircraft. He who does this first – or who keeps the last aeroplane afloat – will win"*
>
> General Sir James Grierson

LEFT: **General Grierson foresaw the potential of aerial reconnaissance and obscured elements of his ground forces from Haig's observation aircraft during the 1912 exercises, securing him victory against the odds** US LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Grierson, whose day job was leading Eastern Command, was very impressed by what had been achieved – but more than that, he foresaw that the military use of aircraft meant the development of aerial combat: "The impression left on my mind is that use of the aeroplane has revolutionised the art of war. So long as hostile aircraft are hovering over one's troops, all movements are liable to be seen and reported, and therefore the first step in war will be to get rid of the hostile aircraft. He who does this first – or who keeps the last aeroplane afloat – will win, other things being approximately equal."

However, caution was still required. Not all troop movements or deployments could be discerned – as Haig found to his cost. Harsh weather reduced visibility or prevented flying altogether, and the natural wastage of aircraft was terrifyingly high – a general would soon 'burn through' his meagre aviation resources, even without the intervention of the enemy.

Senior officers sanctioned experiments in other avenues of deploying aviation at war. Fertile minds were desperate to convert man's newfound ability to fly into a novel means of killing the enemy. Bomb dropping, fitting machine guns, methods of conducting artillery observation by sending range corrections to the guns, were all explored and mostly stymied by the technical limitations of the available aircraft. But the process had begun.

Learning to fly

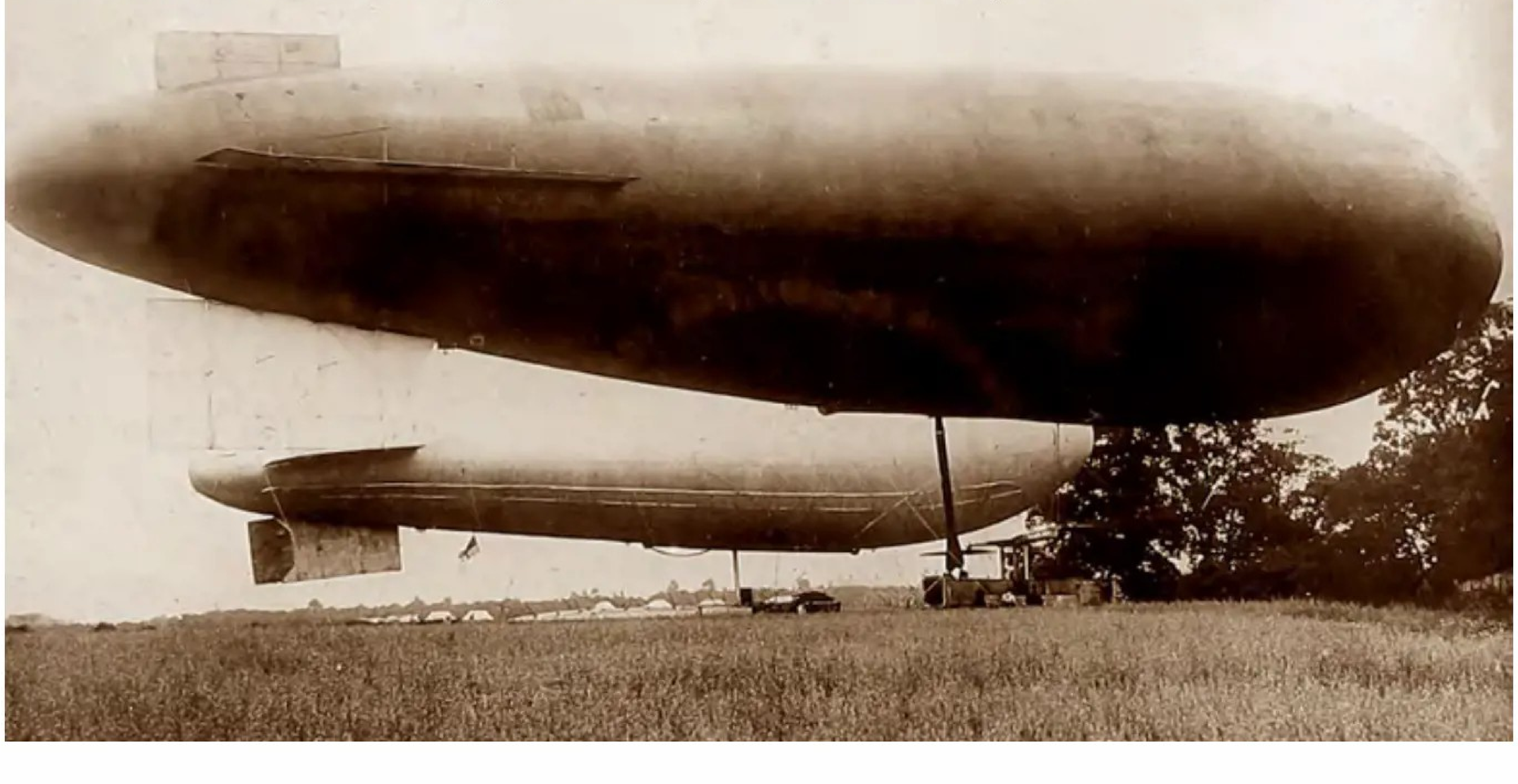
There was a tremendous upsurge of interest in flying in civilian life. Aviation magazines were soon published, relaying to avid readers most intricate details of men and machines that took to the air. Airfields began to multiply, and a mixture of military - and civilian-orientated flying schools established. Flying displays by the most famous pilots of the day drew huge crowds, and these men became household names with their exploits blazoned across the newspapers – which sponsored competitions for new distance records.

Many of the first pilots possessed fantastic characters. They also knew how to have fun. Eric Furlong, of the Hendon-based Hall School of Flying, fondly remembered one such man: "Clarence Winchester was a freelance pilot with his own aeroplane giving joyrides to people for something like a pound a time. He used to put the passenger in the aeroplane and then start frightening them by telling them that they 'mustn't touch this', 'whatever they do, not to lean against that wire' – it was 'absolutely death if they got tangled up' with it.

"By the time they took off they were jelly! When we asked him why he did this he said, 'Well they think they get their money's worth if they're really frightened!'"

Some aviation pioneers went on to found huge aircraft manufacturing

British military airships Delta and Gamma were assigned to Generals Haig and Grierson during the influential 1912 exercise that humbled the former. It was also the last large-scale manoeuvre prior to World War One KGPA/ALAMY



corporations. But at the time they were far less august personages and Eric recalled behaviour that would be unacceptable today: "Frederick Handley Page was a wonderful lecturer; he kept our attention by including sex references in his lessons! For instance, he used to say: 'When the centre of pressure got near to the centre of attraction, then things worked!' That sort of thing.

"At a social event, a beautiful young girl was presented to Handley Page, and she had on her dress a model aeroplane and she was proudly showing this off to him, 'Do you like my aeroplane?' she said. He crudely quipped: 'As a matter of fact I wasn't looking at the aeroplane, I was looking at the landing ground.'"

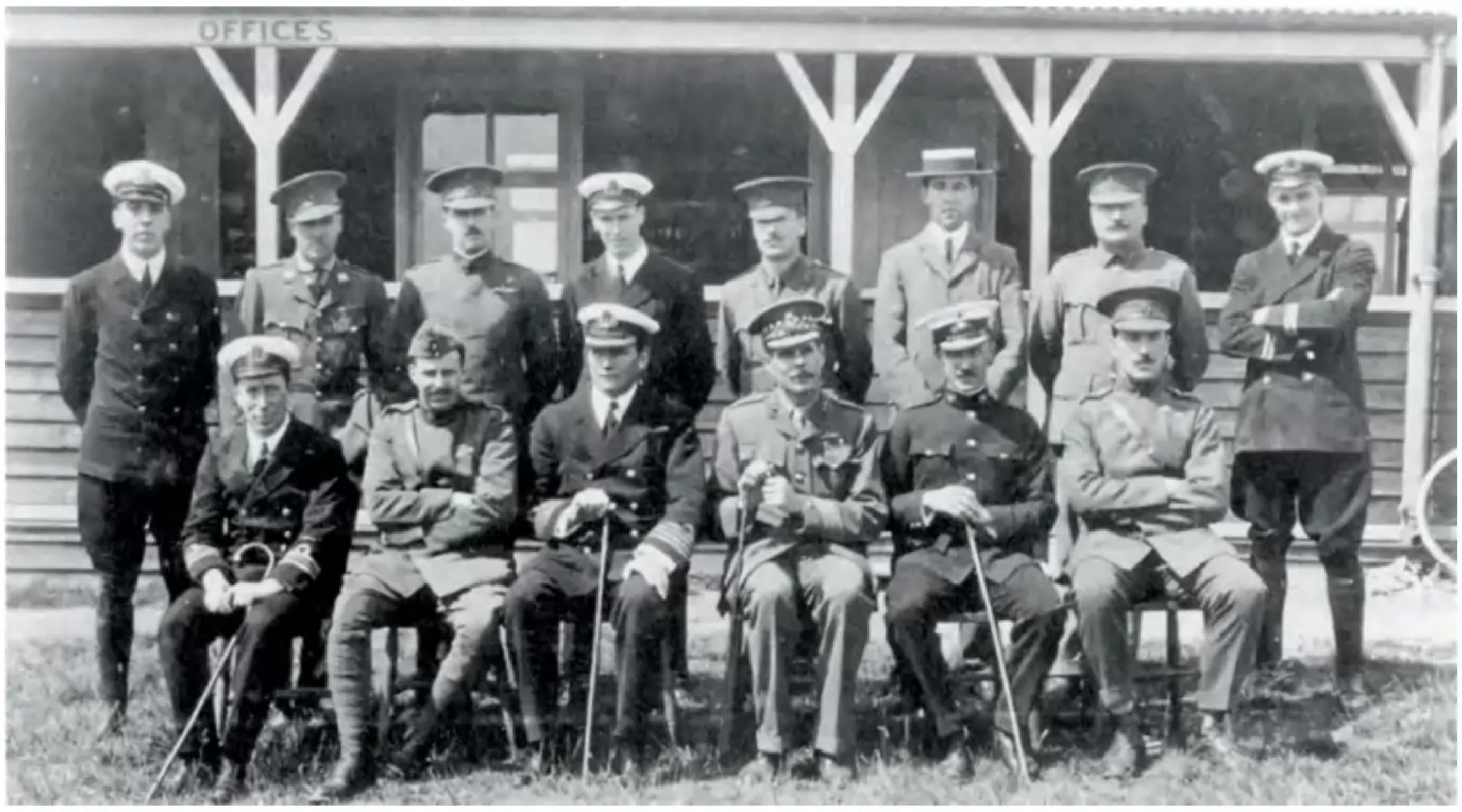
Learning to fly was an expensive and dangerous undertaking. It was the blind leading the blind as nobody knew much about the science of aviation – it had been only a few years since the first powered flight, how could it be otherwise?

Louis Strange remembered learning to fly the Wright Box Kite at Hendon under the tender instruction of Louis Noel: "When I passed on to the Graham White School, I came under the tuition of Louis Noel, the famous Hendon instructor and demonstration pilot. He had a forceful way of expressing himself, 'I have told you how to fly; have you understood? Yes? Well, I give you the last chance to say No! Very well, you can fly, do you hear? I, Louis Noel, say you can fly; I speak no more. I go to the bar; if you commit suicide, which is bad, but if you almost do that, it will be much worse for you!'"

Strange went on to have a highly decorated military flying career spanning both world wars. He was one of the first pilots to complete an aerial loop and a pioneering aviator regarding early air-to-air combat and aerial bombing.

ABOVE: **Powered flight really was the craze of the age, with everyone who was anyone taking in flights or learning to fly – such as Winston Churchill, shown here at the Central Flying School in 1914** FREMANTLE/ALAMY

LEFT: **Louis Strange as an RFC captain of 12 Squadron in 1915** OFFICIAL PHOTOGRAPH



Staff and instructors at the Central Flying School at Upavon, Wiltshire, in 1913. Major Trenchard sits third right, with the school's commandant, naval Captain Godfrey Paine sat third left HMSO

Young men read avidly the enthralling exploits pilots like Noel and Strange, magnificent men in their flying machines, and flocked to watch air shows. There was real excitement in witnessing people cocking a snoot at the laws of gravity – despite the numerous crashes demonstrating that nature could still have its way. A keen enthusiast and future RAF senior officer, Donald Clappen, recalled: "I used to take in the aviation journals, *Flight* and *Aeroplane*. Then in July 1911 the Gordon Bennett Cup took place at Eastchurch. I saw all the famous pilots flying. That really inspired me to think about it myself and see if I could do anything about it.

"I saw not only my first flying, but my first crash! Gustav Hamel got to the first pylon, turned round, overbanked and flew straight into the ground, with the engine running full on. Hamel was thrown about 25 or 30 yards, rolling over and over. The machine was a total wreck, but he was only badly bruised. It was as big a crash as one could ever wish to see. Yet there was this fellow hurled out of the aircraft, rolling over and over, yet he almost got up unhurt. That made me think that aviation was not so dangerous as I thought it might be. Everyone thought I was quite mad.

ABOVE: **Royal Flying Corps groundcrew pose for a group photograph at Farnborough** PRINT COLLECTOR/ALAMY

Clappen remained mad keen to fly and soon had his wish as he took private lessons at the Blériot School of Flying: "The first time I flew was quite by accident. The machine was not supposed to fly – it had been detuned. I was rolling across the ground when suddenly I found the ground receding under me. Of course, this was so unexpected I pushed my stick down and landed with a bit of a crash and found myself with the undercarriage spread all around me and the prop broken. Next, my instructor, a Monsieur Salmet, rushed up to me: 'Why you fly? Why you fly?' I had no answer, I did not know! What had happened was that a gust of wind had caught my aeroplane, and it had taken off without my expecting it to."

Already a team effort

It was clear a measure of aptitude had to be implemented, and by 1911, pilots were required to pass a simple test to show they had mastered their new trade. However, the early tests were somewhat farcical and demonstrated more the limitations in what students had learnt. Clappen recalled: "The pilot's certificate! One had to do five figures-of-eight observed by two qualified pilots. Then came the pièce de résistance – one had to cut off one's engine and land within 50 metres of a defined spot – the instructors themselves. If it looked as if the pupil were to land short, the observers would walk slowly towards the spot to make sure the pilot landed within the specified distance. I do not recall ever a single pupil ploughed for not landing within the specified distance."

> *"Yet there was this fellow hurled out of the aircraft, rolling over and over, yet he almost got up unhurt. That made me think that aviation was not so dangerous as I thought it might be"*
>
> Donald Clappen, future RAF air commodore

However, nothing could disguise it; flying was dangerous – but that did not deter Grahame Donald, who epitomised the spirit that filled these early aviators: "My father died in 1913, he would have stopped me if he had been alive. I was able to buy a Blériot-type monoplane. It cost me one new Rudge motorcycle and £60 [£5,900 today]. The flying machine was delivered near my mother's home in Renfrewshire towards the end of October 1913. I made one or two straight hops – managed to get up and make a landing of sorts in the next field. There were few people who could train you; so you either taught yourself or you broke your neck.

"Flying is quite simple if you do it carefully. I did not fly far, but the fact remains I flew. I thought I was good, but I can assure you I was kidding myself! It really takes an appreciable number of hours in the air to learn to fly an aeroplane properly. At that time, I could take off and land back into the field without crashing.

"We used to say that any landing you could walk away from was a good one!"

Aircraft could not fly without the tender administrations of a variety of specialist riggers and mechanics, and both the RFC and RNAS began to train groundcrew to maintain them. An engine failure or structural collapse could have fatal consequences for the pilot, and also the mission. Groundcrew were already an essential part of flying and without them, aircraft would never have got off the ground – well not more than once!

BELOW: **Royal Flying Corps mechanics learnt how to fix aircraft and replace broken parts, from skids and wheels to the fabric skins** PRINT COLLECTOR/ALAMY

Not so well-off aviation enthusiasts were drawn to this method of getting close to aeroplanes, in the hope of getting a flight or being accepted for pilot training. Air Mechanic Cecil King, of the Central Flying School, was no different: "On parade, civilian enlistments were in the RFC clothes with the wrap-over tunic. But those who had just come from a different service, they did not have the RFC uniform. They were all in their different uniforms – Royal Marines in their kit and sailors in their bell-bottom trousers. Every day was spent on the aircraft in the sheds and in the workshops. We learnt to make simple parts – in case of a vulnerable break, say a skid, we were able to make it out of any available wood. We learned to splice wire cable, because the wires forming the framework were of seven stranded cables. We had the aeroplane spread out on trestles and learned to put the covering on, sometimes linen, sometimes cotton. You laid this stuff on, sewed it together with a balloon seam and then you doped it, which shrank it, so it became drum tight. We learned how to fill up an aircraft, for instance, you must always pour the petrol through a chamois leather, minute details like that."

Starting an aircraft could not be done haphazardly, everything needed to progress in sequence to ensure everything (and everybody) was ready. Take off was second only in peril to landing, and those involved had to get it right. King remembered: "The technique was precise. The officer would get into the aircraft, and chocks put in front of the wheels. Then you would go to the propeller and say, 'Petrol on! Switch off!' He would repeat after you. Then you'd turn the propeller to get a sufficient charge into the cylinders. When you thought it was ready to fire, you would say, 'Contact, Sir!' He would answer, 'Contact!' He would switch the thing into contact.

"You would be careful how you approached the propeller; you'd hold it with two hands and give it a tremendous swing. If it fired, it would start to run, and you get clear and stand by the chocks. When he waved his hand, you took them away. He was ready to take off.

"You could not say anything else, only those words, which were repeated by the officer. There could be no mistake."

RIGHT: **Future 'father of the RAF' Hugh Trenchard, started his service career as an infantry officer before learning to fly and becoming second-in-command of the Central Flying School**
CHRONICLE/ALAMY

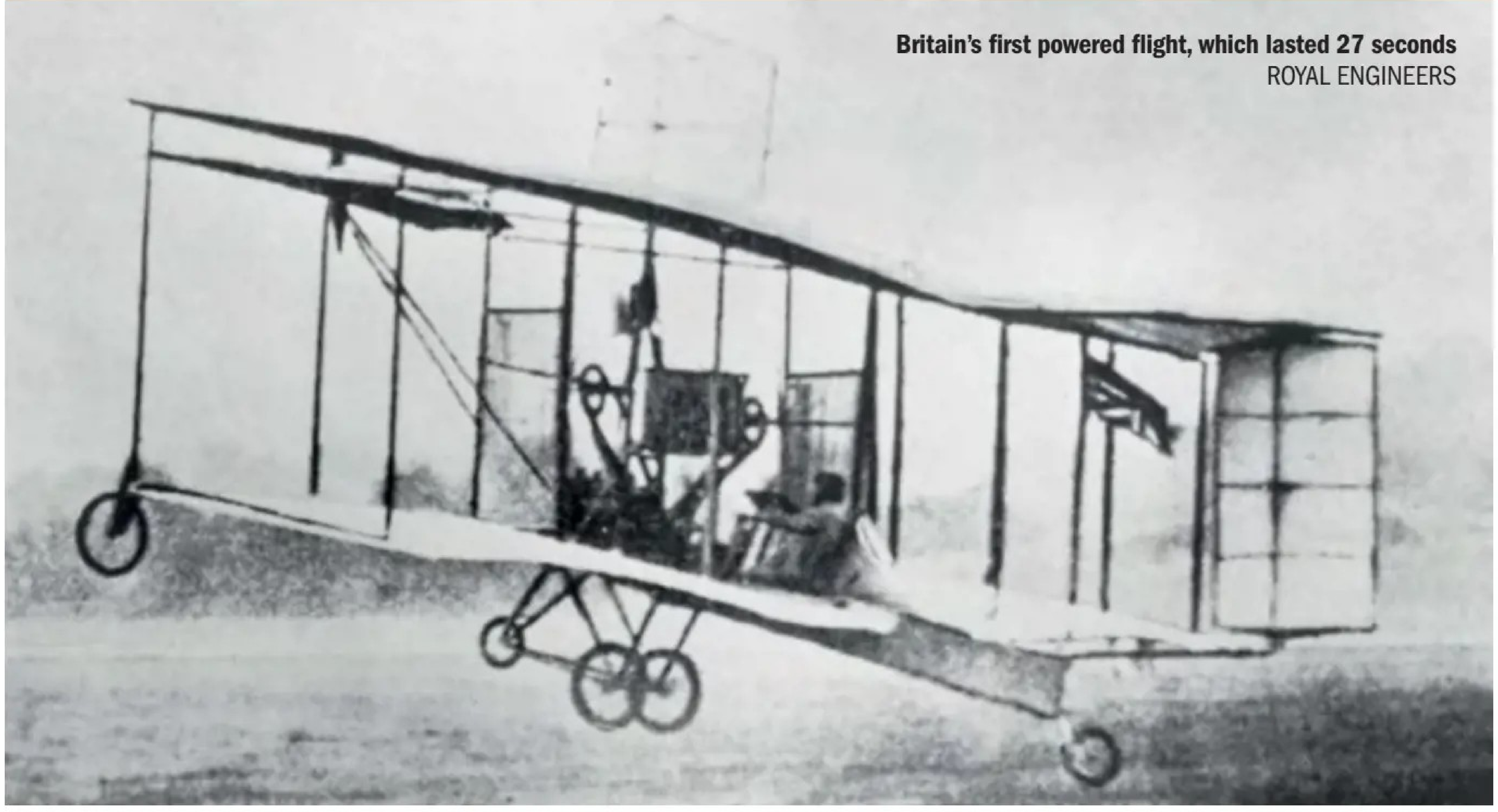
Britain's first aviator

Born in Iowa in March 1867, the pioneer of British powered flight, Samuel Cody, was in fact an American. A Wild West showman who tipped his hat to aviation, he moved to Ash Vale, Surrey, in the early 1890s and became enamoured with manned flight thanks to his association with balloonist Auguste Gaudron.

In 1901, Cody patented a manned kite – the first of several such devices pitched as alternatives to airships for military observation and spotting – in 1903, later crossing the English Channel in one of his designs, being towed by boat. The Army and Royal Navy showed interest, adopting derivatives of his kites, and Cody was appointed chief instructor of kiting for Aldershot's Balloon School in Aldershot and subsequently joined the Army Balloon Factory in nearby Farnborough.

Meanwhile, the Army backed the development of Cody's powered aircraft, the British Army Aeroplane No.1, built by him at Farnborough. Its first flight – and Britain's first heavier-than air flight – took place on October 16, 1908, but led to the aircraft becoming damaged after flying 460 yards. Army support ended in 1909, but Cody continued to develop, update and fly his machines, establishing the first British distance and endurance records in May that year. In December 1910, flying his new machine, Cody won the Michelin Cup for a four-hour 47-minute flight.

Samual Cody died on August 7, 1913, as he evaluated his new Cody Floatplane. The aircraft broke up over Farnborough, killing both him and his passenger, noted first-class England cricketer William Evans.


Britain's first powered flight, which lasted 27 seconds
ROYAL ENGINEERS

The father figure

Meanwhile, at the Central Flying School, a certain grizzled Scots Fusiliers officer was already making a name for himself. Major Hugh Trenchard was born in 1873. He had an undistinguished education, hampered by accusations that he was 'clever but lazy'. In September 1893 he commissioned into the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers with whom he served in India.

It soon became apparent that his unfortunate combination of taciturnity and an abrasive character did not fit into the officers' mess. Indeed, he earned the sobriquet of 'The Camel' due to a combination of his unprepossessing appearance and habit of grunting inarticulately in conversation. Trenchard gained service experience commanding a mounted infantry section in the Second Boer War, but was gravely wounded in October 1900, shot through the left lung with spinal complications that restricted his ability to walk.

He then showed the kind of man he really was. Recuperating in St Moritz, Switzerland, Trenchard became obsessed with mastering the Cresta Toboggan Run, an unorthodox route to health and efficiency. Strangely, it worked, and indeed the jolting of a toboggan crash seemed to alleviate his spinal discomfort, while the frigid air refreshed his damaged lung. After a further stint of service in South Africa he again showed his non-conformist nature by volunteering for secondment to command the Southern Nigeria Regiment, part of the West African Frontier Force in late 1903. It was an exciting period, leading small columns against vast numbers of indigenous natives.

Fortunately for Trenchard, his opponents lacked modern weapons – and sometimes he secured victory by setting off fireworks to scare them. For six years Trenchard played a key role in the mapping and 'pacification' of great tracts of Nigeria, until his health finally broke and he returned to England. Seeking new challenges, he took to the air and learnt to fly at the oldest permitted age.

Ironically, given his significant future role as "the father of the RAF", he was never a good pilot. Nevertheless, a flying certificate opened a new world of opportunity, and he became adjutant of the Central Flying School. Here, as mechanic King recalled, his combination of a domineering character and administrative skills soon made a reputation: "The 2IC, Major Trenchard, used to do a lot of flying and give instruction to the officers. We called him 'Harry Lauder' because he came out of the Scots Fusiliers, and he still wore his old uniform. He had this red and white cap band the same as Harry Lauder [the comedian] used to wear.

"We respected him very much – and we feared him – but there was no doubt he was very efficient. We were all a bit scared of him because he was very severe, and his manner was quite frightening. If you were his orderly – and I often was – he used to call you to him and tell you what you had to do. He would say: 'Now you'll follow 20 paces behind me wherever I go. If I go in a doorway and I want you to come, I'll beckon you. If not, you wait at the doorway 'till I come out!' And if he growled, 'Orderly!' You jumped to attention, stood stiffly to hear what he had to say, then you went off at the double to obey."

> *"We respected Major Trenchard very much – and we feared him – but there was no doubt he was very efficient"*
>
> Air Mechanic Cecil King

He was certainly a fearsome, intolerant figure to young officers detached from their parent units to learn to fly, again, King remembered: "He gave the impression of being a bit of an ogre! If he went down on to the aerodrome, I used to follow him at the prescribed distance; and he would be there, watching the flying. One day he said to me: 'That aeroplane over there, just landed. You will go over and tell the pilot to report to me at once.'

"I went over, and I said: 'Major Trenchard wants to see you, Sir!' The pilot looked very anxious. 'Do you know what he wants, orderly?' I said: 'No, I'm afraid I don't!' I followed him respectfully and he went up to Trenchard, who said: 'You will catch the train back to your unit, and I shall send your report afterwards!' The officer said: 'But Sir…' Trenchard cut him off. 'That'll do! I will send your report in! No wonder they were frightened of him, evidently this man had done something wrong.

There was another side to Trenchard, who also impressed his young pilots. As Second Lieutenant Henri Biard said: "If he had asked me to fly into a brick wall, I would have done it with a singing heart!"

However, war was coming, and Trenchard would indeed ask thousands of young men to do the battlefield equivalent of flying into a brick wall, time and time again – and they would do so. BW

BELOW: **Major Trenchard (left) with Lieutenant Arthur Longmore in a British Army Maurice Farman. The major had a reputation for strongly chastising pilots, but ironically was a mediocre airman himself!** CHRONICLE/ ALAMY

LONGMORE
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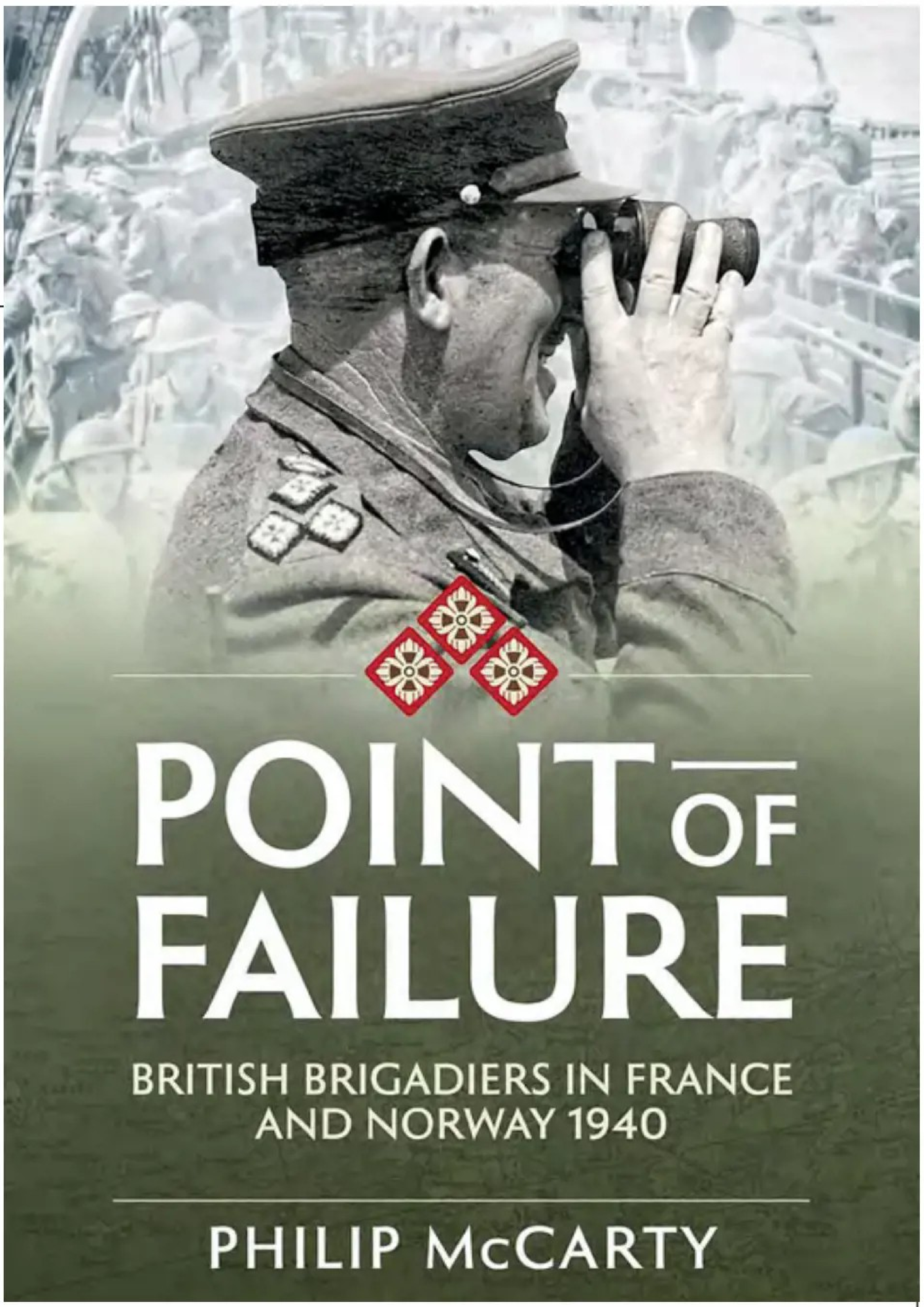
Point of Failure

British Brigadiers in France and Norway 1940

By Philip McCarty



By late June 1940, the British Army had endured two strategic defeats in quick succession: Norway and France. In both cases, British forces had been withdrawn in ignominious evacuations. These failures cast a long shadow over the future of the army, particularly for those brigadiers who had held field command. Post-war scholarship has often argued that 1940 triggered a wholesale 'career purge' of these officers, as the army sought to rebuild a command structure capable of resting imminent invasion.

However, in *Point of Failure*, Philip McCarty challenges this long-standing interpretation. Rather than accepting the narrative of a sweeping clear-out, the author offers a data-driven investigation into the fate of the army's middle leadership after 1940. Drawing on research conducted for his doctoral thesis at the University of Wolverhampton, McCarty presents a alternative case that most of these officers not only remained in service, but advanced to senior positions of rank.

Central to McCarty's analysis is a straightforward question: what factors determined whether a brigadier survived professionally after 1940? To answer it, he draws on an array of sources to build a dataset that catalogues the backgrounds of the brigadiers who served in France and Norway. Each entry is mapped against an array of variables, ranging from schooling, regiment served in, Staff College attendance, service in World War One, interwar postings and patronage from, senior officers. Through this, McCarty subjects his data to a form of social network analysis, providing a means through which the reader can appreciate the often-vague forces that influenced promotion and career longevity in a tradition-bound institution.

By adopting this kind of analytical framework, McCarty offers fresh and occasionally surprising insights into the structure of the Officer Corps during World War Two. For example, while the author does highlight familiar factors of advancement – Staff College attendance – he finds limited evidence for some often-cited drivers of promotion. For example, he finds that patronage by senior officers like Alan Brooke, while present, was neither widespread nor a guarantee of advancement. Likewise, no single regiment nor public school dominated the backgrounds of those who did rise to higher ranks, and he does not find much evidence to suggest that promotion was driven by 'old-boy' networks rooted in shared postings or regimental loyalty.

Rather, the author's research reveals acomplex picture in which advancement post-1940 depended on an ability to adapt to the army's shifting needs and perceived future utility – for instance, capacity for staff work or command in new theatres. In other words, the army did not simply discard brigadiers based on operational outcomes; rather, their advancement was influenced by an interaction of institutional preference, professional history and observed potential. Exemplifying this, McCarty shows how, of the 13 brigadiers who served in Norway, more than half rose to major-general. Such findings form the core of a direct challenge that involvement in the twin disasters irreparably tainted a career. In doing so, the author highlights how military institutions, even when under immense pressure, can look past performance when weighed against future promise – suggesting a much more pragmatic, flexible approach to British wartime leadership than assumed.

Through this, McCarty presents a case study in how institutions manage defeat and maintain continuity in times of crisis. His conclusions resonate beyond military history and offer insight into management leadership and the enduring influence of social networks within hierarchical systems.

McCarty sets campaign narratives aside in favour of institutional analysis, and readers are expected to engage with concepts more familiar to the dynamics of social organisation than military narratives. For those accustomed to strategic overviews or battlefield drama, the focus on archival patterns and network models may be off-putting. However, for readers with an interest in leadership under stress or the sociology of military institutions, *Point of Failure* is surely a landmark study. It breaks new ground by shifting the gaze from generals and tactics to the career mechanics of those whose futures were not just shaped by performance in crisis, but how they fit into, and adapted with, a hierarchal institution in a time of crisis.

Reviewed by Tom Baker

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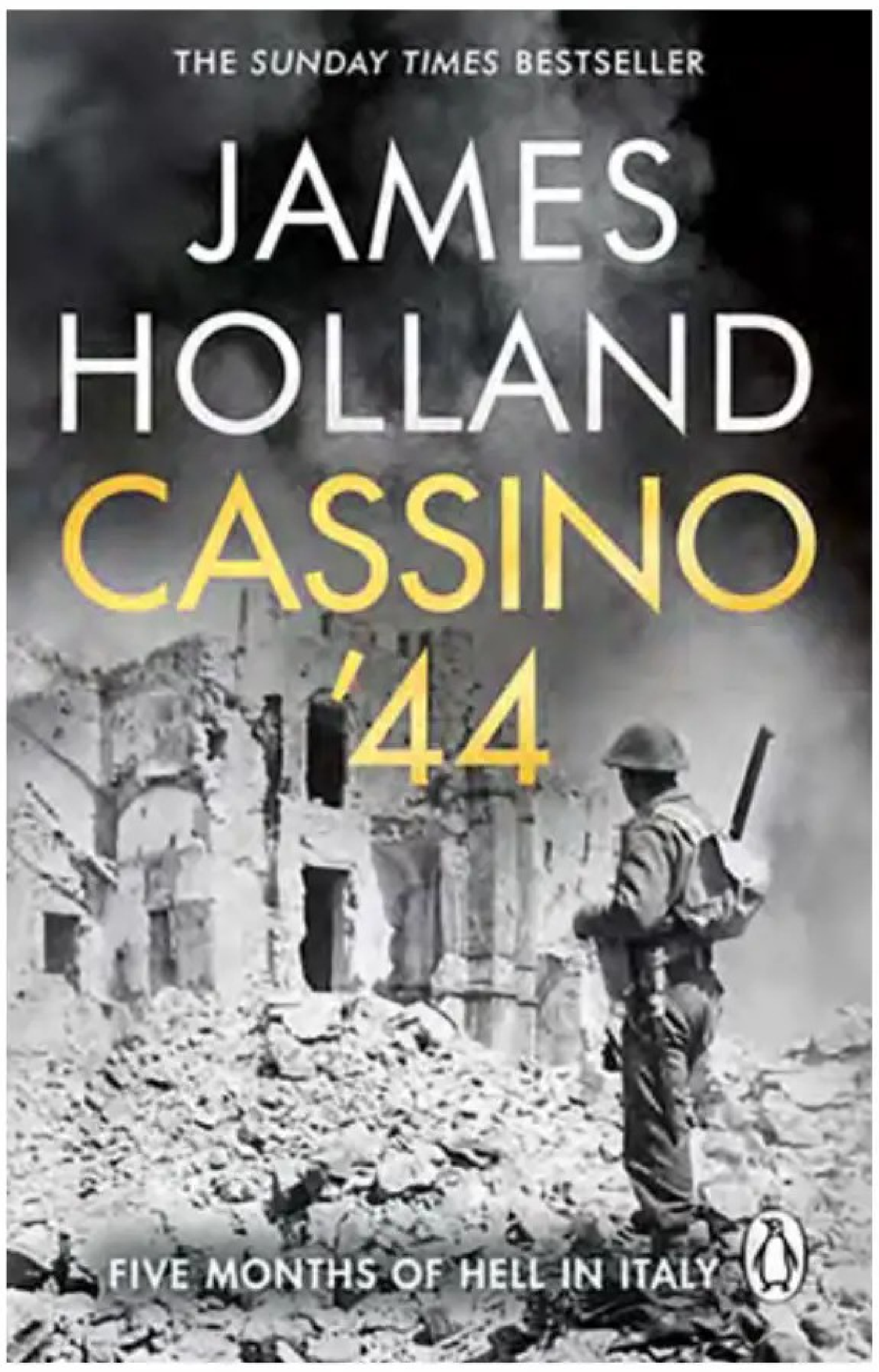
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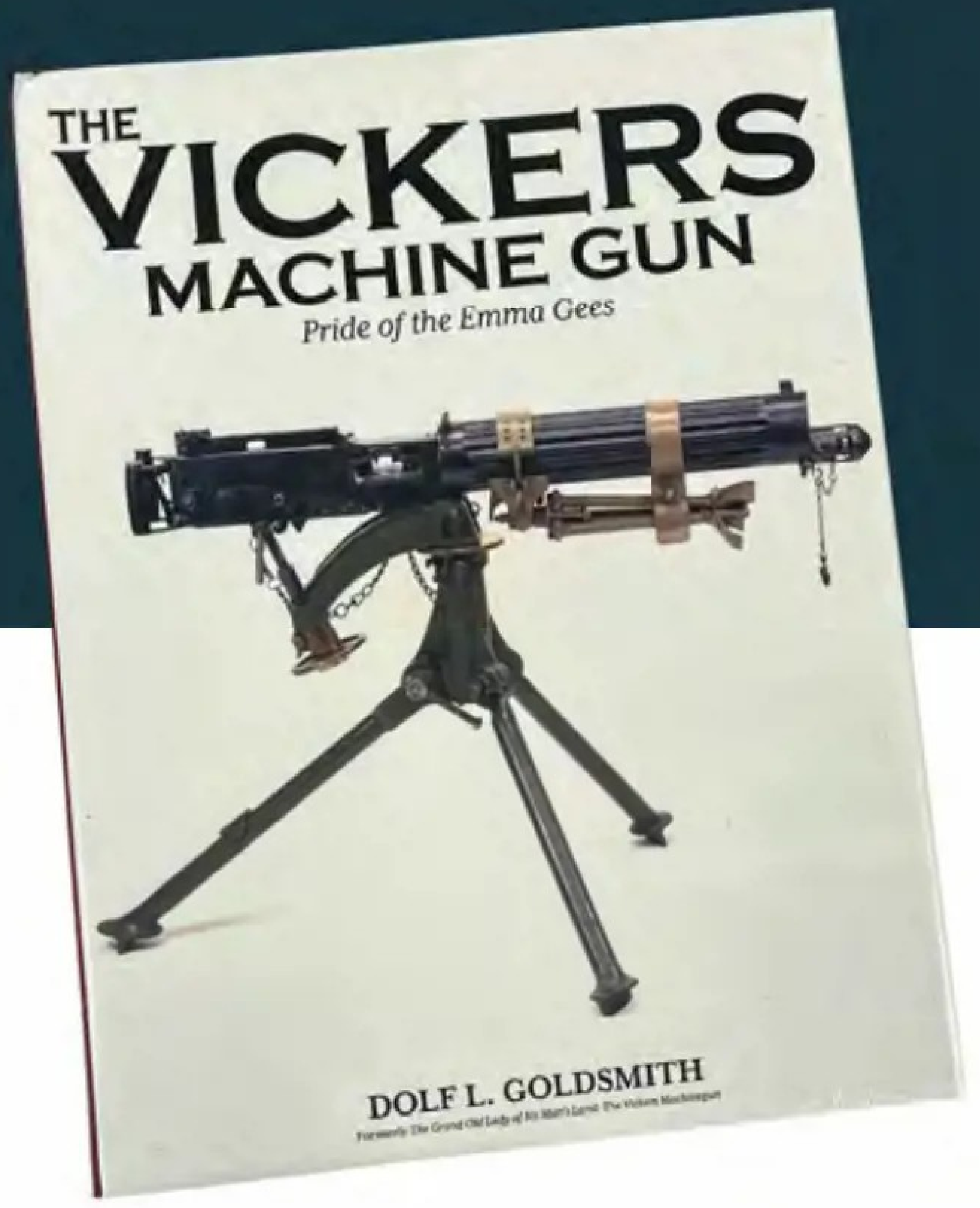
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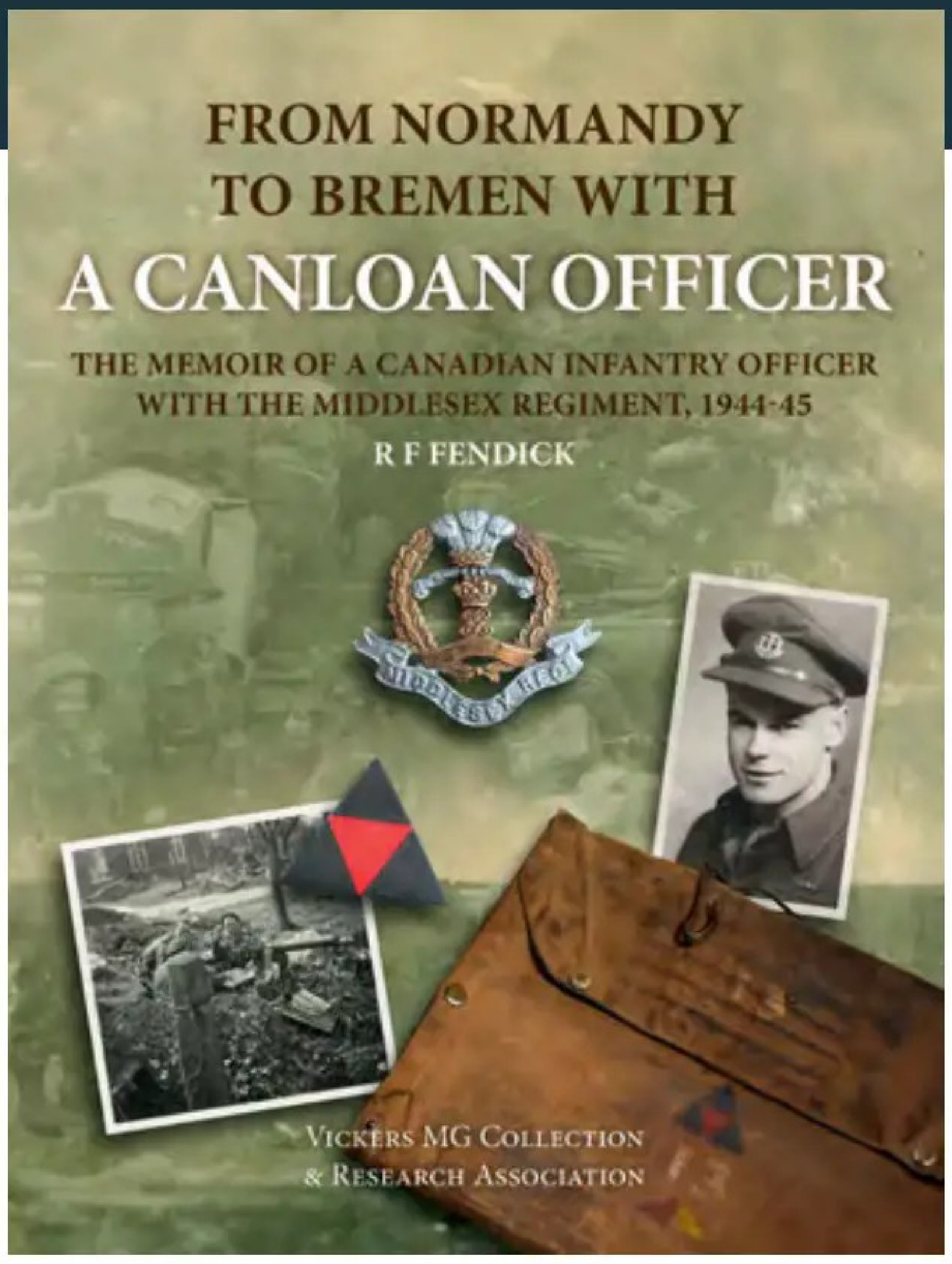
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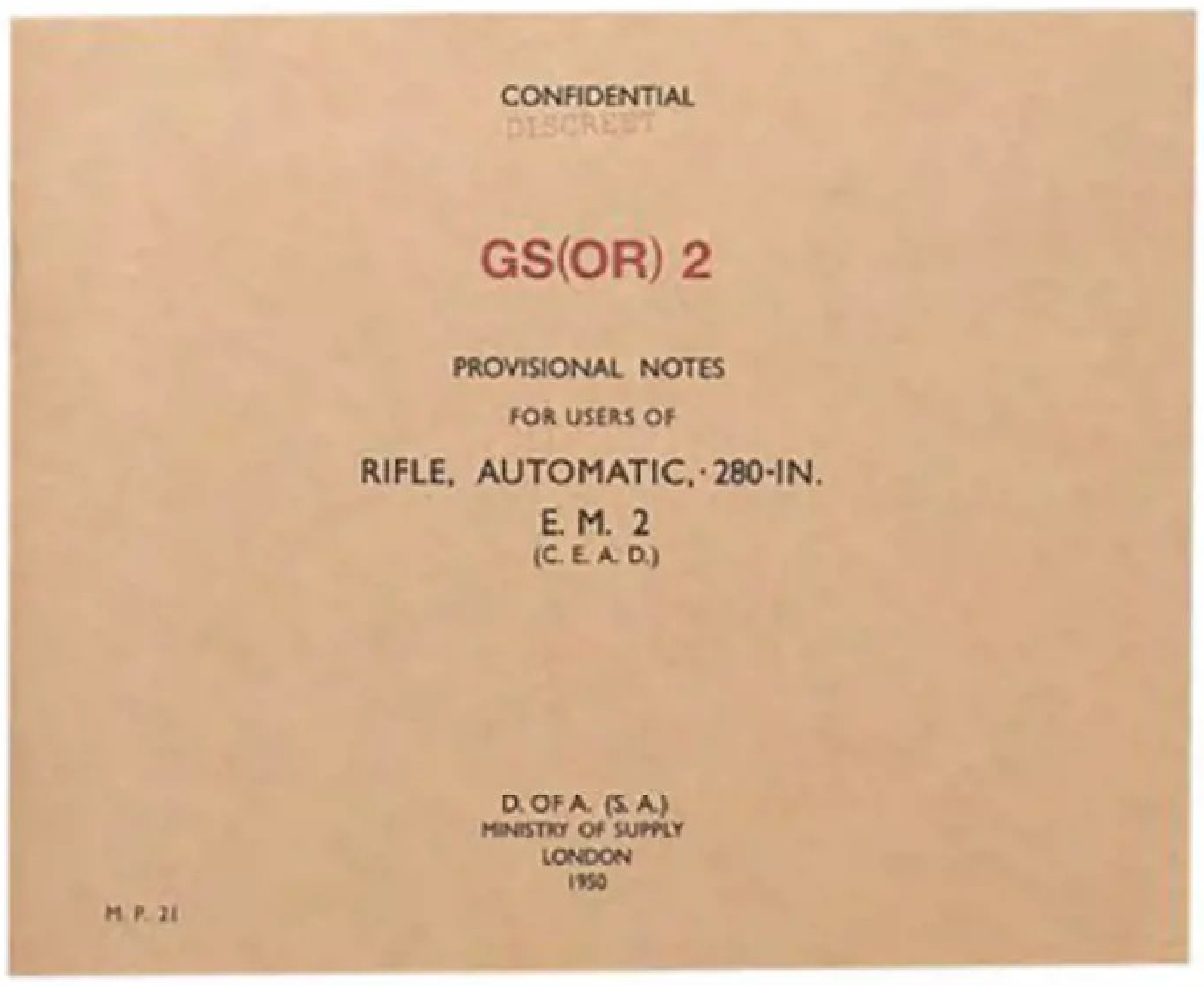
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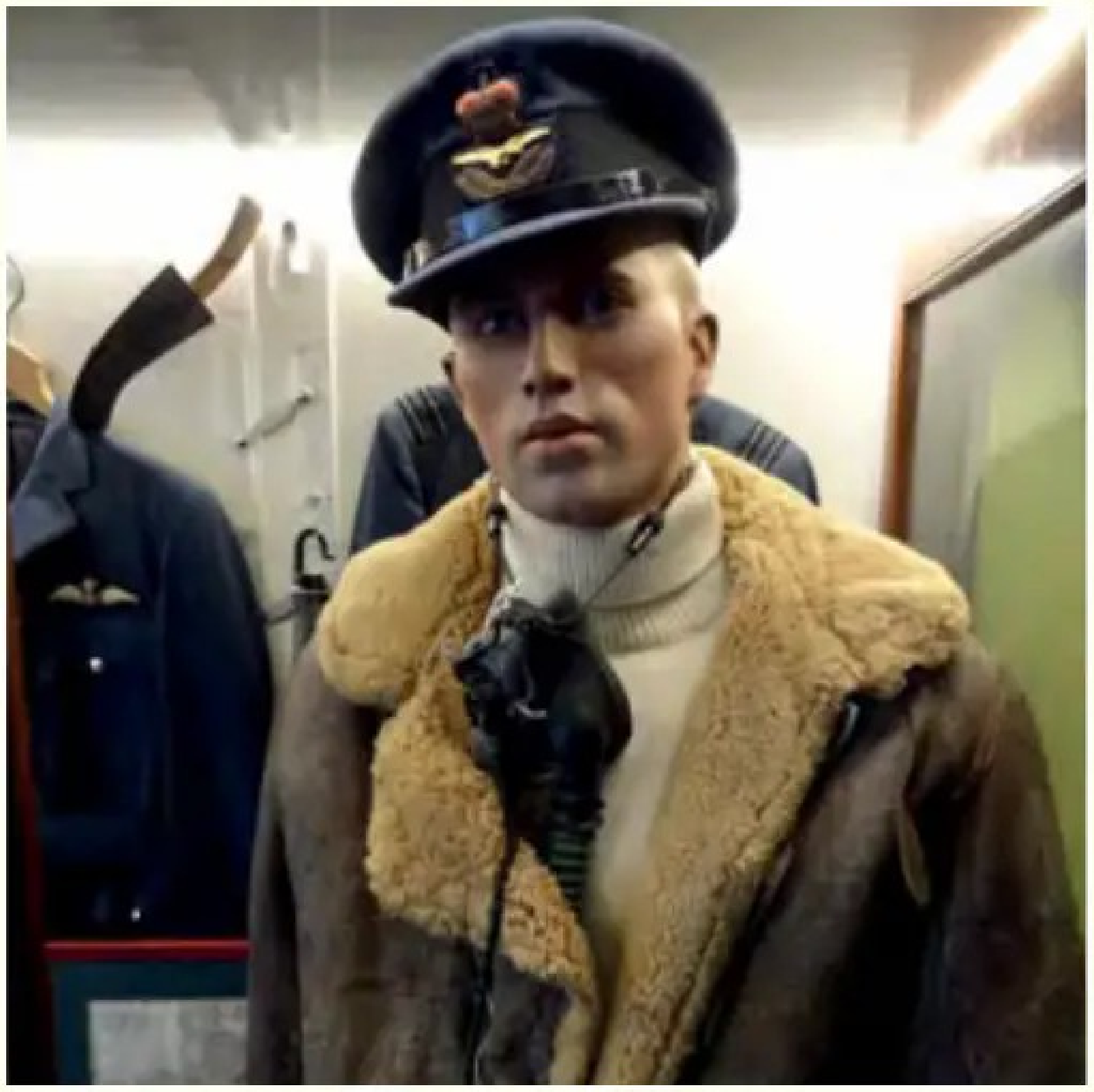

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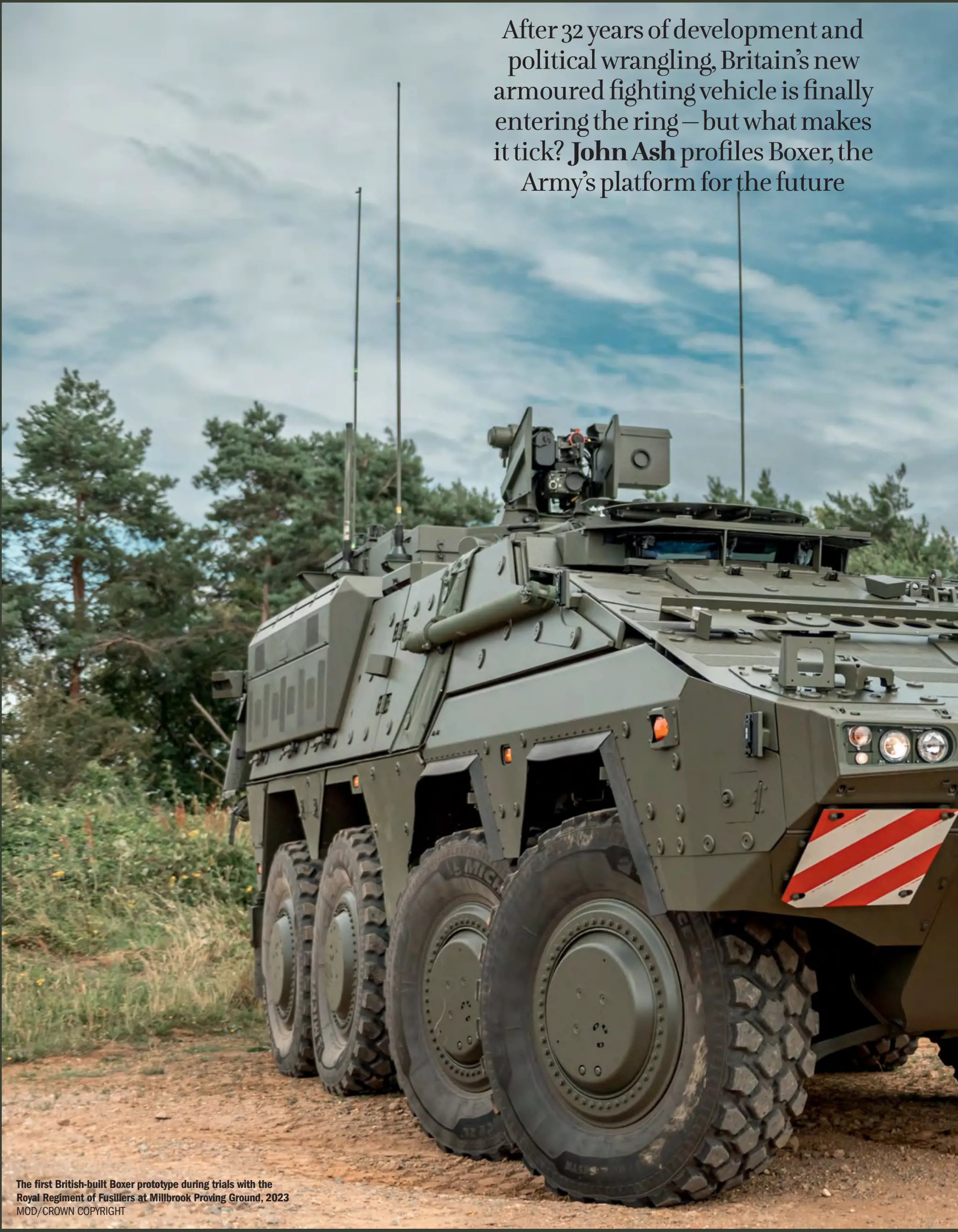


After 32 years of development and political wrangling, Britain's new armoured fighting vehicle is finally entering the ring – but what makes it tick? **John Ash** profiles Boxer, the Army's platform for the future

The first British-built Boxer prototype during trials with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers at Millbrook Proving Ground, 2023
MOD/CROWN COPYRIGHT

Britain's Middleweight CHAMPION

When it first rolled off the production lines in Telford, Shropshire, it certainly looked imposing and formidable. In its base form the GTK Boxer, Britain's new infantry fighting vehicle (IFV), stands just few inches shorter than the Challenger 2 tank – add a mission module with a 30mm turret or the RCH155 howitzer, and it towers above almost any armoured vehicle.

The first British-built production Boxer was unveiled in January 2025, but its origins date back to the 1990s. In 1993 a Franco-German project devised a multi-role, wheeled armoured vehicle to replace France's AMX-10RC, VAB and ERC-90 Sagaie and Germany's Spahpanzer Luchs, TPz Fuchs and M113, the project partially inspired by the 1980s development of the EXF (Experimental Fahrzeug), Daimler Benz's 22-tonne 8x8. Similar in appearance to World War Two's M8 Greyhound 6x6 armoured car, this vehicle was also developed into the Radpanzer 90 tank destroyer.

Other influences included the US Marine Corps' adoption of the LAV-25, a Piranha-based 8x8 IFV bought off the shelf in 1982 and selected over Britain's CVR(T) because it could self-deploy over greater distances. The LAV's expeditionary credentials were vindicated in 1989, when LAV units in Panama proved more responsive and agile than US Army units fielding the M2 Bradley IFV. Further, light armour did not equate to light firepower, as during the 1990-91 Gulf War a USMC battalion and its LAV-25s stopped an entire Iraqi division.

A German Boxer ambulance disgorges a stretcher case for evacuation by a Bundeswehr NH90 helicopter during an exercise at Camp Marmalin, Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan AFP/GETTY

> *"The first British-built Boxer was unveiled in January 2025, but its origins date back to the 1990s"*

Another contributing element was the US Army's 1999 failure to deploy Task Force Hawk – a formation of M1 Abrams tanks and Bradleys – to Kosovo before the conflict was resolved. Famously, then US Army Chief of Staff, General Eric Shinseki, quipped that the US Army was "too fat to fly and too light to fight" in reference to its mix of heavy armour and Humvees. This led to the Medium Weight Concept and the LAV III/Stryker. The first Stryker brigade was deployed to Iraq in 2003 and immediately proved its worth by deploying – as a complete unit – 435 miles in 24 hours. Both LAV-25 and Stryker were influential for European armies seeking to replace legacy armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and the Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs) used in Afghanistan.

From the British perspective, the relationship with this European project began in 1996. However, in 1999, France left, developing the successful GIAT/Nexter VBCI IFV. The same year, eight Boxer prototypes were developed, and in 2001 the Netherlands entered the project. A second run of prototypes were ordered, with the vehicle officially named GTK Boxer in 2002 – ironically, some produced by Alvis Vickers at Hadley Castle in Telford.

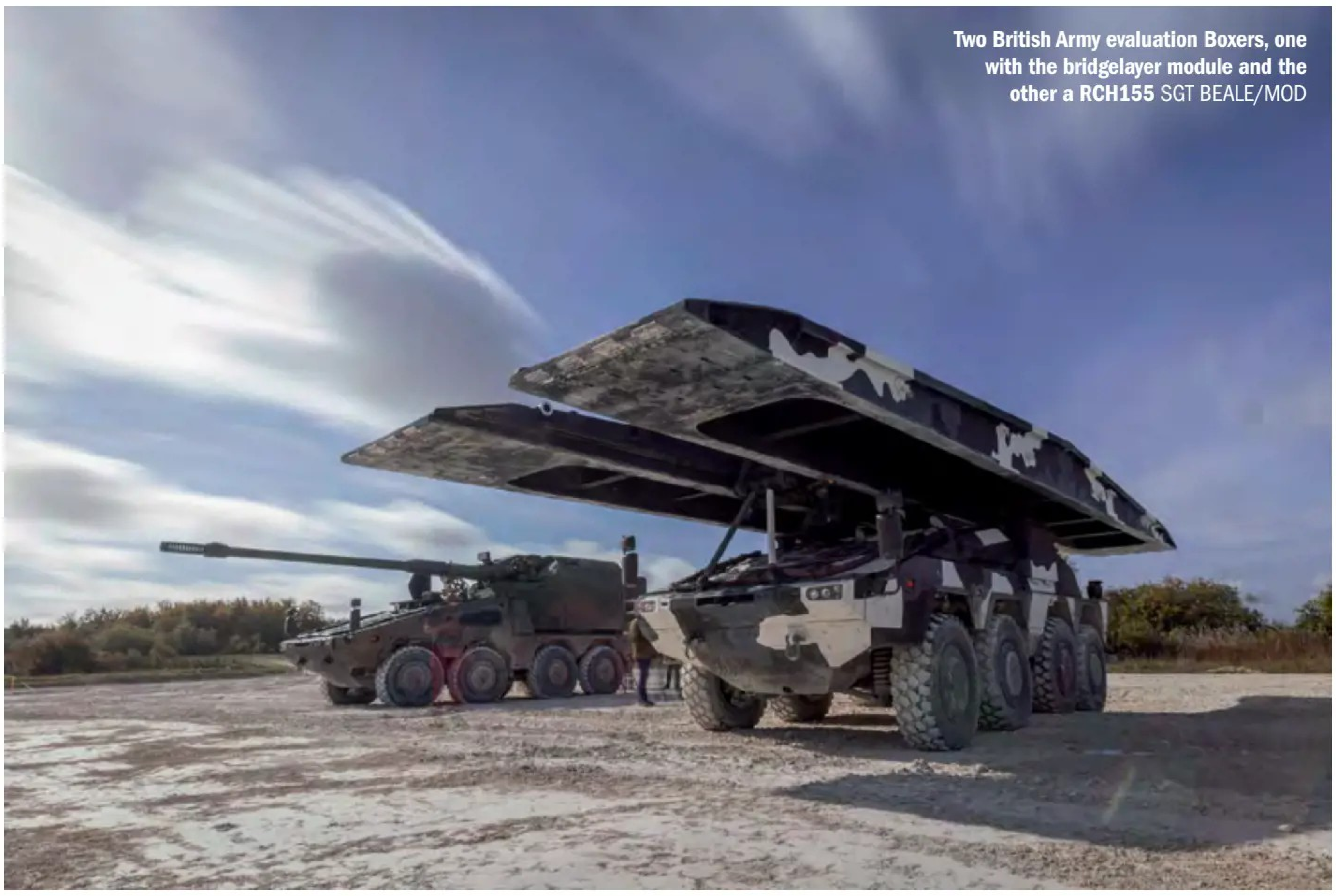
Scouting an alternative

Initial production runs of 600 vehicles were expected, but in July 2003, the British withdrew from the programme to pursue FRES (Future Rapid Effect System) – a flagship procurement of 4,000 vehicles. Originally to be fulfilled between 2010-19, its main objective was two-fold, the UV (Utility Vehicle) to procure a mediumweight wheeled platform replacing the Saxon, FV432 and the some of the CVR(T) family, providing infantry with protected mobility, command and control, repair and recovery, and armoured ambulances. The tracked SV (Specialist Vehicle) would replace CVR(T)s in mechanised/armoured units, catering for reconnaissance, repair, recovery, joint fires, command and control, and combat engineering roles. Both were to be modular designs, with a common hull mounting role-specific modules tailorable for mission requirements.

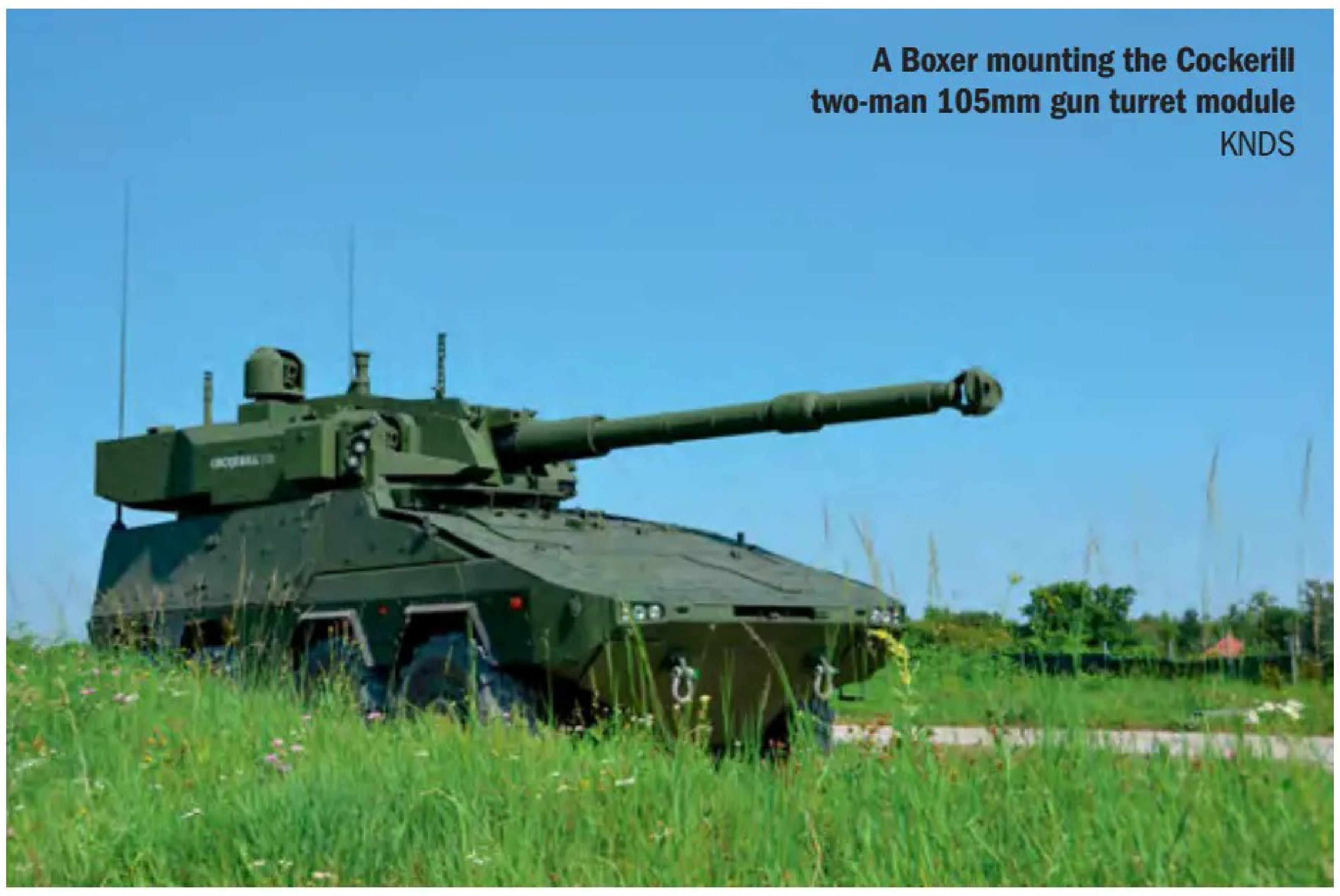
The frontrunners for UV were the VBCI, the Swiss Piranha V – but built by General Dynamics UK – and incredibly, Boxer. In May 2008, Piranha V, an 8x8, 30-tonne IFV, was selected but the contract was scrapped in December that year. The trials that selected Piranha V are interesting because, well, they did not exist, and what was tested instead was a modified LAV III. The British wanted to jointly own the IP of the vehicle but disagreements about this caused contract negotiations to stall. This led to the project being put on ice when the 2008 global financial crisis started to bite.

Piranha V eventually entered service in 2015 with Monaco its first operator. It has since been adopted by the Royal Danish Army and is in use with/ordered by Romania, Spain and Germany.

Ultimately FRES too became a victim of cuts, although the SV element was lifted and developed separately, leading



Two British Army evaluation Boxers, one with the bridgelayer module and the other a **RCH155** SGT BEALE/MOD


A Boxer mounting the Cockerill two-man 105mm gun turret module KNDS

Bundeswehr soldiers with a Wolfgang robotic dog and their Boxer infantry carrier, July 2022 AFP/GETTY

to the Ajax SCOUT SV. These 40-tonne vehicles, armed with a 40mm CTA cannon, were based on the 26-tonne Austro-Spanish ASCOD IFV but have been plagued by teething issues and budget overruns.

Route to service

While the British continued down a dead-end road with FRES, Boxer development continued in Germany and the Netherlands unabated. Responsibility for the project and for all Boxer contracts became that of ARTEC GmbH, an industrial consortium within which its members have changed with the temporary participation of France and Britain.

Its consistent constituents, on a 50/50 basis, are KNDS Deutschland GmbH & Co (formerly Krauss-Maffei Wegmann) and Rheinmetall Land Systeme GmbH – also responsible for the Australian factory, while Rheinmetall Defence Nederland BV is concerned with Dutch involvement. Rheinmetall and also participates in RSBL (Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land) and its £56m Hadley Castle factory. Stockport-based WFEL (now part of KNDS UK) also contributes to British Boxer production.

In October 2003, the first Dutch prototype was delivered and three years later the Royal Netherlands Army confirmed procurement of 200 vehicles to replace its M577 armoured command vehicles and support variants of its indigenous YPR-765 IFV. The first Dutch Boxer (designated Pantserwielvoertuig) was delivered in 2013 with the €1.2bn run – comprising 92 engineering/recovery vehicles, 52 armoured ambulances, 36 command vehicles, 12 bulk/weapons carriers and eight training vehicles – complete by 2018.

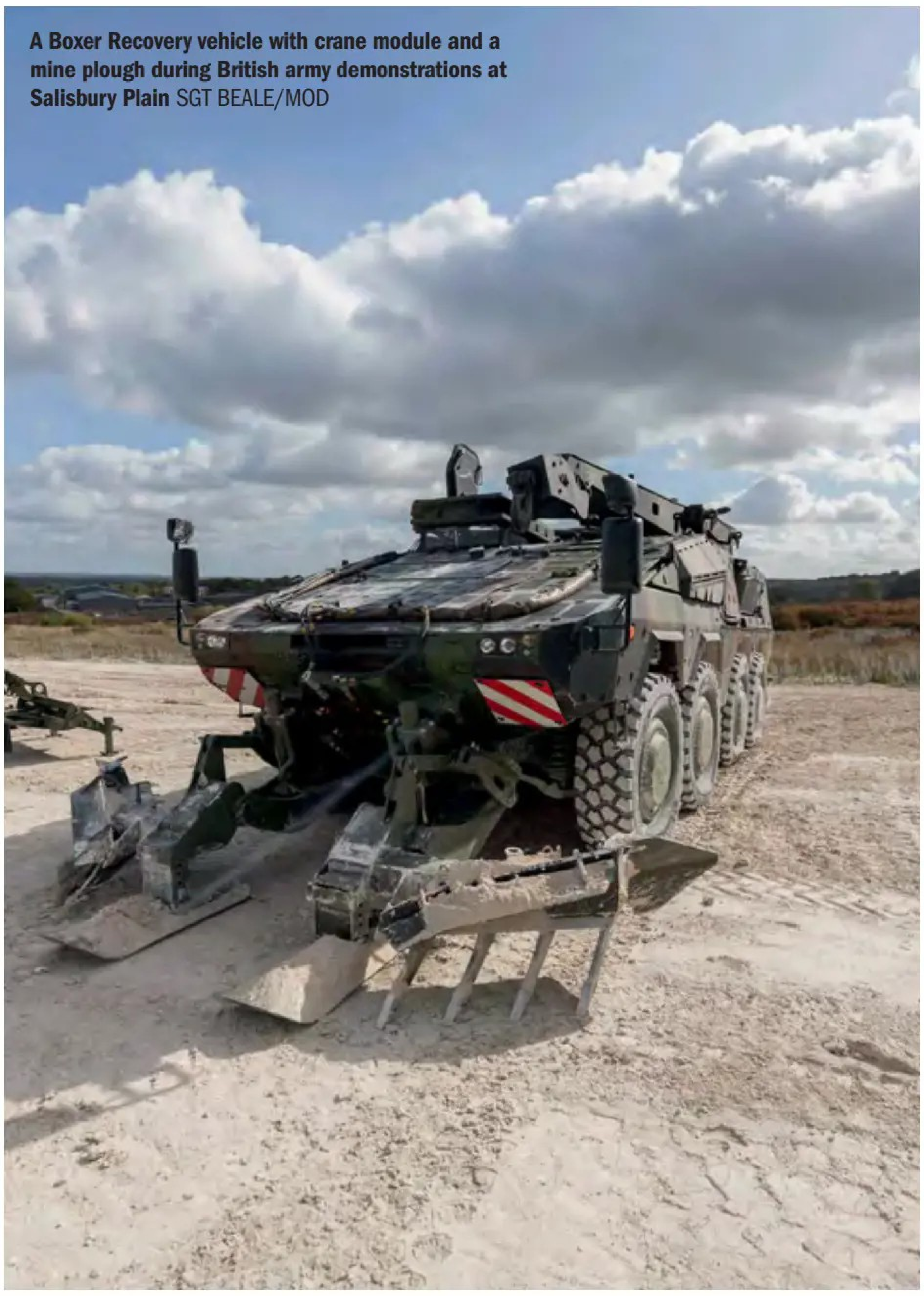
In December 2006 Germany's government signed off on an acquisition of 272 Boxers, the first delivered in 2009. Although Germany has opted to primarily use tracked IFVs, the Bundeswehr operates a large contingent of wheeled vehicles and 825 TPz Fuchs serve alongside 403 Boxers. The original German procurement was for 125 APC, 65 command, 72 armoured ambulance, and 12 training vehicles but more than 510 have since been ordered.

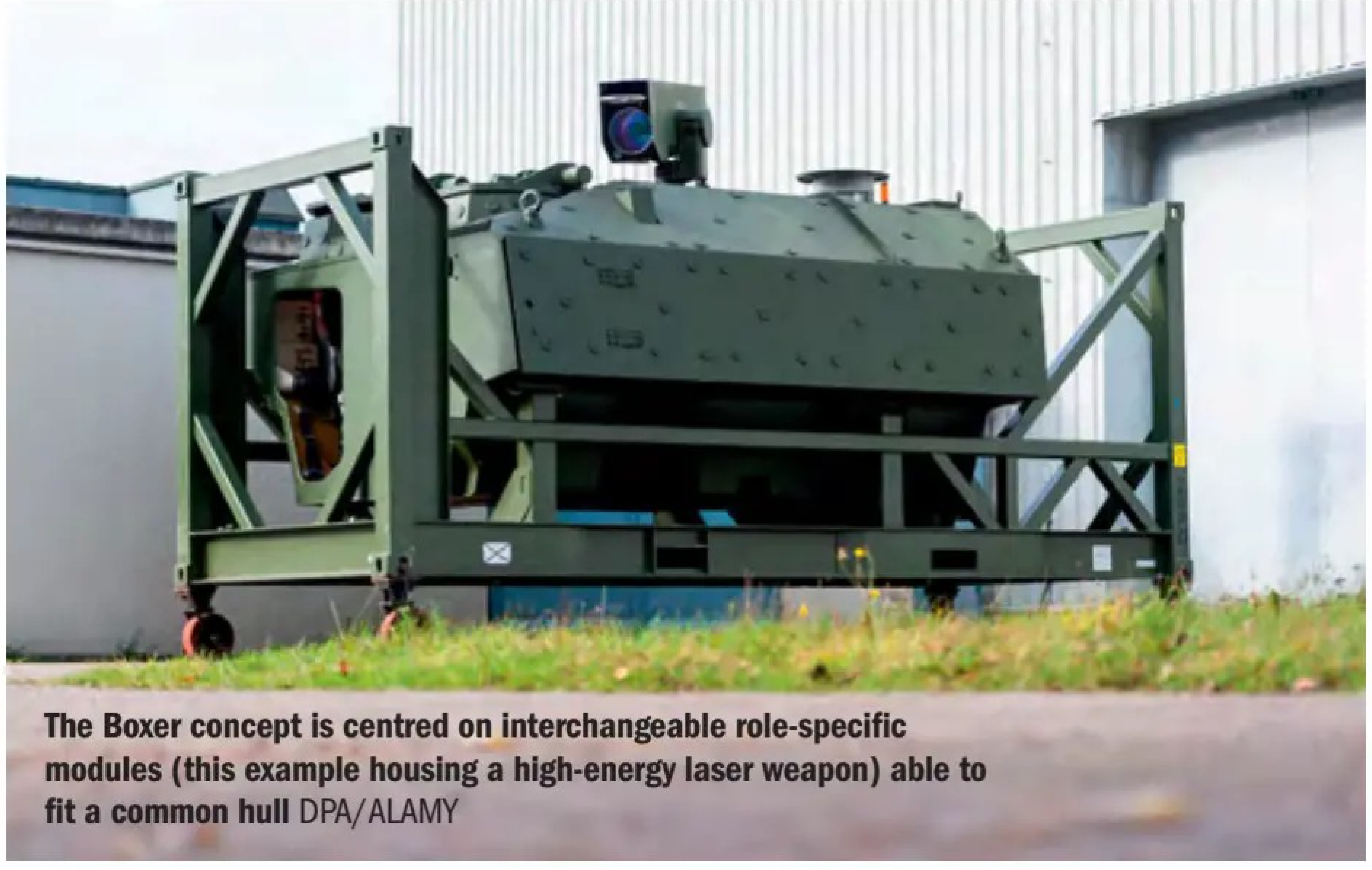
Australia received its first of 221 Boxers in 2018 as part of its Land 400 Phase I programme. Phase II should see more procured in at least seven variants to replace Australia's 250 or so ASLAV IFVs. Australia has procured the CRV reconnaissance variant and with raised tensions in Europe, 123 CRVs are to be bought by Germany as heavy weapons carriers. Lithuania received the first of 91 Boxers – designated the Vilkas (Wolf) – in 2017 and has ordered a further 27.

Utilitarian utility

The concept underpinning Boxer is simple: a common drive module paired with swappable mission modules enabling a variety of role-specific equipment in armoured boxes to be

A German Boxer infantry carrier with RWS blends into woodland near Tangermude, 2024 SEAN GALLUP/GETTY


A Boxer Recovery vehicle with crane module and a mine plough during British army demonstrations at Salisbury Plain SGT BEALE/MOD



The Boxer concept is centred on interchangeable role-specific modules (this example housing a high-energy laser weapon) able to fit a common hull DPA/ALAMY

A Boxer of the 2nd/14th (Australian) Light Horse showcases its mobility AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE

deployed. Boxer may look like a lorry, but is anything but. It is a proper armoured vehicle with all-wheel drive, four wheels that steer, and all-round independent suspension. These features give it off-road performance that enables it to keep up with tanks cross country.

When developed, Boxer was the largest and heaviest vehicle of its type although in recent years new designs are closer in combat weight. Five hull forms exist, designated A0 to A3 – including the A2/A3 hybrid. A2 and A3 hulls are the most common but all measure 26ft long, 9.8ft wide and 7.8ft in tall in their base configuration. Initial variants could support a combat weight of 35 tonnes, but the A2/A3 hybrid and A3 support up to 41 tonnes. Boxer may be transported by air in the A400M Atlas, but its drive and mission modules must be flown separately. Three aircraft may lift two Boxers and their modules in this fashion.

Powered by either 720hp MTU 8V199 TE20 or 800hp MTU 8V199 TE21 diesel engines and Allison HD4800SP ten-gear automatic transmission, Boxer is capable of 64mph (on road) and has a range of 684 miles. The eight giant wheels and self-inflating, run-flat tyres contribute to impressive ground clearance and off-road characteristics with Boxer able to cross a 6½ft trench or scale a 2½ft vertical rise.

Officially, Boxer's updated protective qualities are classified, but initially drive modules were protected by welded steel armour able to resist 30mm fire in the frontal arc (NATO STANAG level 6) and all-round protection resistant to 14.5mm fire (STANAG level 4). Advanced Modular Armor Protection (AMAP) packages, developed by IBD Deisenroth Engineering, provide modular composite armour/crew safety options tailorable to threats including AMAP-L (a spall liner), AMAP-IED (mines/roadside bombs) and a range of other protections including additional roof armour or enhanced protection from kinetic energy penetrators and shaped charges.

All-round cameras and sensors provide continuous long-range, HD visuals displayed on screens within the vehicle, enhancing threat detection and situational awareness. Air conditioning and nuclear biological and chemical protection systems enable Boxer to operate in extreme temperatures and contaminated areas.

Mission modules can be as well-protected, although some need only resilience to shell splinters. Originally, 23 modules were offered, but Boxer can now be optimised

BOXER VS CONTEMPORARY 8X8 APCS/IFVS

	BOXER A3	**VBCI**	**LAV VI**	**PIRANHA V**	**STRYKER**	**BTR-90**	**VPK-7829 BUMERANG**
Country:	Germany/ Netherlands/UK	France	Canada	Switzerland	US/Canada	Russia	Russia
Service:	2011-	2008-	2016-	2015-	2002-	2008-	Prototype
Length:	26ft (7.93m)	24.9ft (7.6m)	25.65ft (7.8m)	26ft	22.8ft (6.95m)	25ft (7.64m)	28.8ft (8.8m)
Height:	7.8ft (2.38m)*	9.8ft (3m)	10.67ft (3.26m)	7.7ft (2.35m)	8.65ft (2.64m)	9.9ft (2.98m)	10.1ft (3.1m)
Weight:	Up to 41 tonnes	32 tonnes	Up to 28 tonnes	30 tonnes	16.5 tonnes	21 tonnes	34 tonnes
Powerplant:	MTU 8V199 TE21, 820bhp	Renault D12D diesel, 550bhp *or* Volvo D13, 600bhp	Caterpillar C9 Turbo diesel, 450bhp	MTU 6V199 TE21, 586bhp, *or* Scania DC13, 655bhp	Caterpillar C7, 350bhp	Turbo diesel, 510bhp	UTD-32TR turbo diesel, 510bhp
Armour:	Up to STANAG 6	Up to STANAG 4	STANAG 2***	STANAG 4/5	STANAG 4	Equivalent to STANAG 4	Equivalent to STANAG 4
Max speed/ range:	64mph/684mi	62mph/470mi	62mph/370mi	62mph/340mi	60mph/310mi	62mph/500mi	62mph/500mi
Standard armament (as troop carrier):	RWS with 7.62mm MG3/FN MAG, *or* 12.7mm M2/ M3M HMG	GIAT M811 25mm cannon, 7.62mm FN MAG/ANF1	M242 Bushmaster 25mm cannon *or* RWS with 7.62mm C6 GPMG	RWS with 12.7mm M2 HMG	RWS with 12.7mm M2 HMG *or* 40mm Mk.19 GMG	2A42 30mm cannon, 7.62mm PKT, 9M113 Konkurs missile, 30mm AGS-17 GMG	RWS with 2A42 30mm/AU-220M Baikal 57mm cannon, 7.62mm PKT *or* RWS with 12.7mm DPV-T
Crew/ dismounts:	3+8	2+9	3+8	3+8	2+9	3+7	3+8
No. built, all variants:	1,860**	630	118	Approx 311****	4,900	Approx 130	5 (2,000 ordered)

NOTES: *Without turret. **Production ongoing. ***Add-on armour available. ****Up to 1,200 ordered.

> *"Boxer may look like a lorry, but is anything but. It is an armoured vehicle with all-wheel drive, four wheels that steer, and all-round independent suspension. These features give it off-road perfomance that enables it to keep up with tanks"*

for some 45 roles ranging from personnel carrier to fire support, mine clearance and self-propelled gun. This versatility means the base vehicle may be adapted to fulfil all sorts of tasks while still being relatively transportable. Boxer can be an up-armoured, cannon-armed IFV for major conflict against peer adversaries, but configured to a lightweight protected mobility platform for counterinsurgency in as little as an hour.

Jack of all trades

Most in-service Boxers are equipped with a remote weapon station, a Kongsberg Protector M151 RWS on Dutch vehicles and the KMW FLW-200 RWS on German. These typically accommodate a 7.62mm MG3 or FN MAG machine gun, a .50-calibre M2 or M3M heavy machine gun, or a 40mm automatic grenade launcher. Rangefinders, optics, sensors and thermal imagers are also fitted.

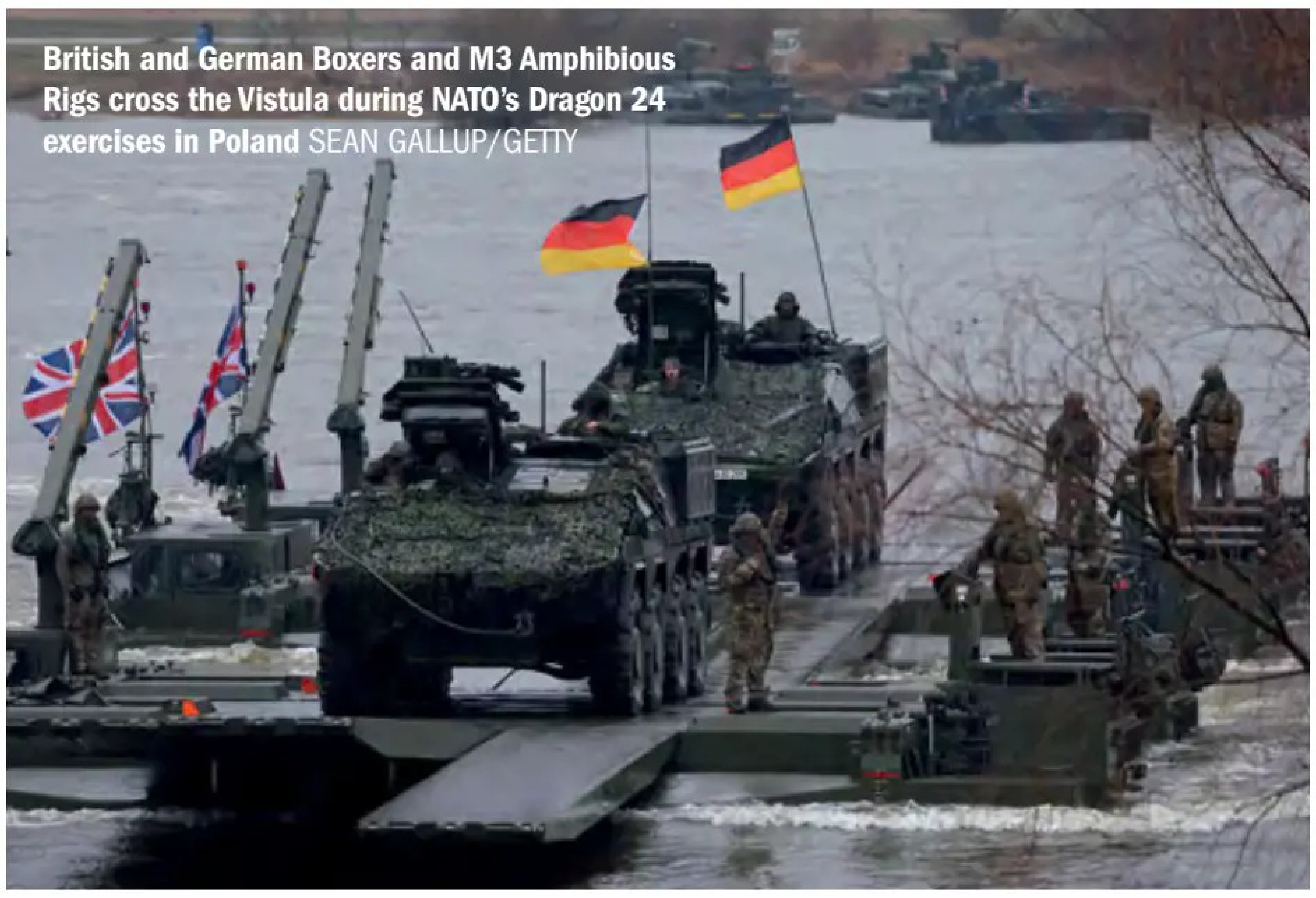
Australian CRV and Lithuanian Vilkus Boxers are more powerfully armed, the former the product of a Germano-Australian requirement for a 38-tonne variant based on the A2/A3 hybrid and equipped with the Rheinmetall Lance CRV turret mounting a Mk.30-2/ABM 30mm cannon, Spike LR2 missiles and Elbit Iron Fist active protection system. Vilkus mounts the Rafael ADS Samson Mk.II RCT turret with ATK Mk.44S 30mm cannon and Spike missiles. Qatar has ordered the Boxer RCT30/AiTO30 FDC with its 30mm turret as a combination IFV/counter-drone vehicle. The Netherlands and Germany also ordered 222 RCT30s between them. The RCT30 differs from the CRV in that, despite sharing armaments, the CRV is a dedicated reconnaissance/fire support vehicle while the RCT30 retains full troop-carrying capability.

Another variant on order is SkyRanger 30, an air defence version mounting an Oerlikon KCA 30mm cannon in a high-angle turret, paired with radars, day/night optics and, optionally, a launcher for short-range missiles such as FIM-92 Stinger. Firing airburst ammunition at 1,200 rounds per minute, SkyRanger is formidable against low-flying aircraft and helicopters. A 35mm variant is planned.

Perhaps the most striking variant is the RCH155, ordered by Britain and Qatar in 2024. In Britain, it will replace the AS90 and Archer, while in Qatar they replace PzH 2000s. The module is based on a lightened Rheinmetall 155mm L52 howitzer paired with the KNDS Artillery Gun Module. Fully autonomous, it may be mounted on various vehicles, including modified Boxer A3s.

The growing threat against self-propelled guns is the increasing speed and precision with which the opposition can detect incoming rounds, trace them, and retaliate. 'Shoot-and-scoot' systems based on lorries have therefore become popular and the RCH155 Boxer is the ultimate form of this. Uniquely, it is capable of firing on the move, as RCH155-equipped vehicles do not require outriggers or stabilisers. In preliminary tests, the vehicle deployed, fired eight rounds and was on the move again within 90 seconds.

The Australian Boxer CRV dwarves the M1A1 AIM SA Abrams tank AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE



British and German Boxers and M3 Amphibious Rigs cross the Vistula during NATO's Dragon 24 exercises in Poland SEAN GALLUP/GETTY

Third-time lucky

Ironically, as current order numbers stand, Britain will be the largest Boxer operator – a vehicle it twice decided it did not want.

Post-FRES, the British launched the Future Utility Programme in 2014. This evaluated the VBCI, which was tipped for acceptance but not selected. Instead, the UV programme was revived as the MIV (Mechanised Infantry Vehicle) project in 2018 and the frontrunners were the Singaporean/Irish ST Kinetics Terrex, Finnish Patria AMV, VBCI and Boxer.

Boxer emerged as the preferred choice and in November 2019 it was announced Britain would procure 523 Boxer A3s with enhanced suspension in nine variants, costing £2.3bn. UK-specific features have been added to architecture, including Thales UK's Acusonic shot detection system and the obligatory Boiling Vessel. Provision was made for a further 900 vehicles to be ordered, and 100 more were purchased

ELECTRIC AVENUE

An offshoot of FRES that appears to still be under development is DSTL's Electrically Charged Armour: ECA. Likened by the media as a 'force field', British experiments in ECA – officially the Pulse Power System – requires vehicles be fitted with two thin shells across the hull and turret surfaces. The outer layer holds a powerful electric charge, the inner layer is grounded, and a non-conductive insulating layer is sandwiched between them.

If hit by a HEAT round, such as an RPG warhead, the penetrating material connects with both layers, completing the 'circuit' and enabling electrical energy to dissipate the force and vaporise the penetrator. The advantages of ECA are even and equal protection across the vehicle, deleting traditional weak spots. Additionally, it offers substantial weight savings and could be light enough for smaller vehicles. Moreover, it removes a danger posed by ERA – reactive armour – bricks, which detonate to reduce the penetration of attacking weapon systems but also spread shrapnel in an arc, a hazard to nearby infantry or civilians. The primary disadvantage is that, as yet, not enough energy can be generated from on-board vehicle systems so ECA may not protect against larger threats.

The United States has tested a similar concept using composite layers of materials including plastics, fibre optic matting and metal coils.

A prototype tracked Boxer hull with computer-generated RCT120 turret overlaid, a potential future option for a light tank KMW GMBH

A Boxer CRV opens fire during an exercise with Japanese troops near Townsville, Queensland AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE

in 2022, followed by 96 RCH155 Boxers in 2024. The British acquisition currently stands at 146 troop carriers, 60 engineering vehicles, 62 fire support/reconnaissance vehicles, 28 mortar carriers, 50 light aid detachment/repair vehicles, 158 command vehicles, 43 observation vehicles, 11 EW/SIGINT platforms, 65 armoured ambulances and 96 self-propelled guns – a total of 719.

Originally intended to equip four infantry battalions, Boxer was to serve alongside the Warrior IFV, Foxhound and Mastiff within the Strike Brigades. However, with the cancellation of the Warrior life-extension it is expected Boxer will furnish eight battalions – at least until a replacement for Warrior is procured. Perhaps the upcoming tracked Boxer, rated to carry 50 tonnes, may be the ideal replacement for the venerable 1980s Warrior?

Although the initial British vehicles were German-built, the lion's share are to be produced at home with the drive modules built at Stockport and assembled in Telford. More than 100 British suppliers are involved, including Rolls-Royce, Thales and Horstman, with three-quarters of Boxer components for the British vehicles are provided through the UK supply chain. The first British-built production-standard Boxer was completed on January 21, 2025, and it is expected 100 will be produced annually, with initial operational capability for the first 27 expected in 2025 and full operational capability achieved by 2032.

No cannon-armed Boxers have yet been procured by the British, with UK-built Boxers typically equipped with the Protector RS4 RWS with M2 machine gun. Orders for air defence variants and platforms for uncrewed aerial systems are also expected, but heavier armament modules utilising British weaponry are also seen as an essential follow up. This includes Boxer Overwatch, a RBSL/Lockheed Martin UK proposal for a module launching Britain's Brimstone land attack missile, while Boxer LPS could see a new multiple-launch rocket system enter British service. Any order for a cannon-armed variant could equip the Martlet lightweight multi-role missile, while launchers for Brimstone and the AIM-132 ASRAAM air defence missile have already been developed by Britain and deployed in Ukraine on Supacat HMTs, and these modules theoretically translate neatly to Boxer.

Fit for the future?

The first British unit to receive Boxer will be the 1st Battalion, The Royal Regiment of Fusiliers, which has been involved in acceptance trials. Without life-extension, it is envisaged Boxer will equip British units into the 2060s.

Criticism of Boxer is focused on its towering height, and the fact it has taken more than 30 years to reach British troops. However, a KNDS representative highlighted another potential problem regarding the British purchase: "The key issue is the lack of a cannon-equipped variant – Ajax will struggle to keep pace on long road deployments. Germany and the Netherlands are acquiring RCT30s, so both may establish fully coherent medium brigades. The RCT30 turret is the same

"As current order numbers stand, Britain will be the largest Boxer operator – a vehicle it twice decided it did not want"

The British have ordered 96 Boxer RCH155 as part of the Mobile Fires Programme KMW GMBH

Several turret and heavy weapon options for Boxer are available, such as this example based on the Puma IFV turret JAAP ARRIENS/GETTY

RHEINMETALL
DEFENCE

A Lithuanian Land Force IFV Vilkas with Rafael Samson combination 30mm cannon/Spike-LR missile turret ARTEC

IS BOXER ALREADY PUNCHING ABOVE ITS WEIGHT?

The proving ground for Boxer could well be Ukraine, where the vehicle is expected to become increasingly important within the Ukrainian Ground Forces.

At time of writing, Ukraine is thought to operate at least 63 Boxers, but how many are in country or what variants it operates has not been publicised due to operational security protocols. However, Ukraine ordered the RCH155 in 2022, and later the RCT30/AiTO30 FDC. In January 2025, reports emerged that nine RCT30s had been delivered while defence commentator Thomas Newdick stated Ukraine had received its first RCH155s.

A source told *BAW* that: “Boxer may or may not be in country and already being used.”

It is understood there are no issues with Boxers that might be deployed in Ukraine. According to Dutch intelligence and defence analysis agency Oryx, none have been lost as of April 2025.

as that used on the Puma IFV and has the ability to engage aerial and ground targets. It’s a stunning capability thanks to Rheinmetall’s 30mm Mk.30 cannon, twin ATGMs, and active protection system. It’s interesting that turreted 8x8s carrying an infantry section are increasingly seen to offer more utility than a tank, and at almost half the cost.”

In 2020, Belgian engineering firm John Cockerill announced it would provide 105mm gun turrets. Additionally, the RCT120 module mounts a Rheinmetall Rh-120 L/44 120mm gun in lightweight turret. The intention is not to deliver a replacement for tanks but to provide a fire support for Boxer units and act as an emergency tank destroyer in a sudden encounter. The KNDS representative added: “These are attractive potential variants. KNDS integrated the Cockerill gun on Boxer but so far there has been little interest. I expect this to change as European armies begin to re-arm.

“There is a need for light tanks/mobile gun systems and the US Army’s retired Stryker MGS did not fail because the concept was invalid, but because its implementation was technically flawed. Italy’s Centauro and Japan’s Type 16 MCV have been successful. The US Army had selected the M10 Booker, this was directly analogous to the Stryker MGS – but better able to cope with the weight of the turret; however, it has no operational mobility, whereas Boxer has this. This is one reason why the M10 was recently cancelled.”

As yet, Boxer has seen little combat. However, it was deployed by the Bundeswehr to Afghanistan from 2011. No soldier riding in one was killed or injured, and the vehicle proved so boringly reliable that it became a non-story.

Ticks all the boxes

Boxer is prized for its versatility and operational mobility, and its success has led to the tracked variant, currently testing in prototype form. Usefully, the same mission modules may be used across both wheeled and tracked fleets. Moreover, the Boxer family continues to grow with an ever-increasing number of modules, including a bridge layer and a drone mothership.

Boxer offers considerable utility across multiple deployment types, able to be airlifted into a new theatre with mission modules meeting contemporary requirements. As the situation changes, emerging requirements can be met by flying out the applicable module and craning it in place: APC and engineering variants may be initially required by a stabilisation force, but when a belligerent faction loots tanks from a state armoury, anti-tank and artillery modules can be flown out to the peacekeepers and fitted within a day.

Armies seldom end-up fighting the conflicts they expect – note how many times Western militaries geared for major wars against peer adversaries have been forced to operate in a far-flung campaign outside the parameters of its central doctrine. Flexibility is much valued, and Boxer offers this in both low and high intensity scenarios.

From Britain’s perspective, European deployments are its most probable missions; but equally, it may be required to fight in Africa, the Middle East or even Korea. Boxer is ideal for any eventuality – not least because after it is flown in, it can move 500 miles within 24 hours and be ready to fight anything when it gets there.

A British Boxer prototype (likely a German-built machine) being put through its paces on Salisbury Plain in 2019 JACK ECKERSLEY/MOD

MILITARIA MATTERS

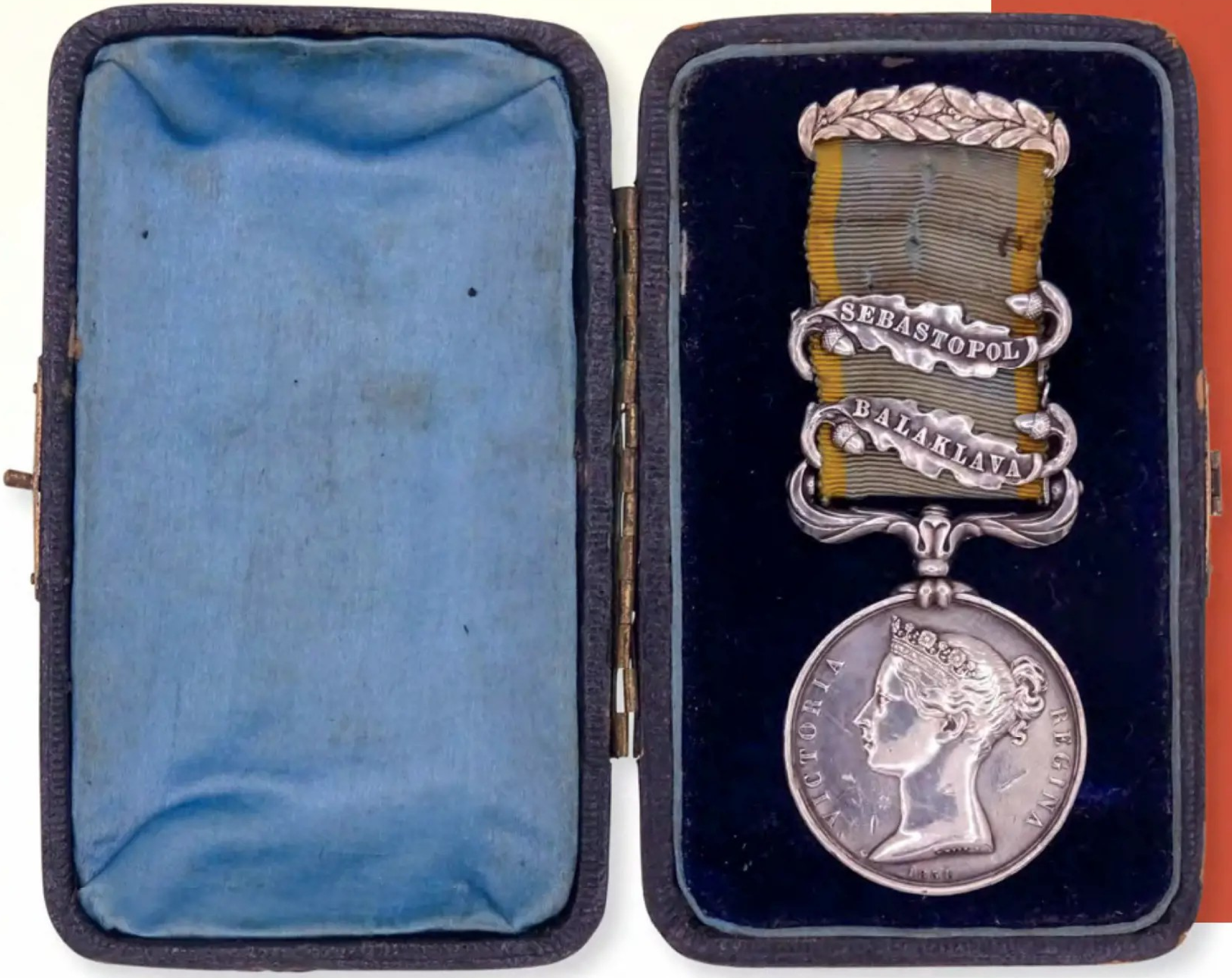
Duncan Evans is your guide to must-have collectables from the dealers and auction houses. This month: Crimean War medals and artefacts

As the war in Ukraine lurches towards some kind of conclusion, the fate of the Crimea, under Russian occupation for the last 11 years, will be a hot topic. The peninsular is, of course, no stranger to conflict involving Russia, as it was the scene of 19th century battles at Alma, Sevastapol, Balaclava and Inkerman on land, and in the Sea of Azov at sea.

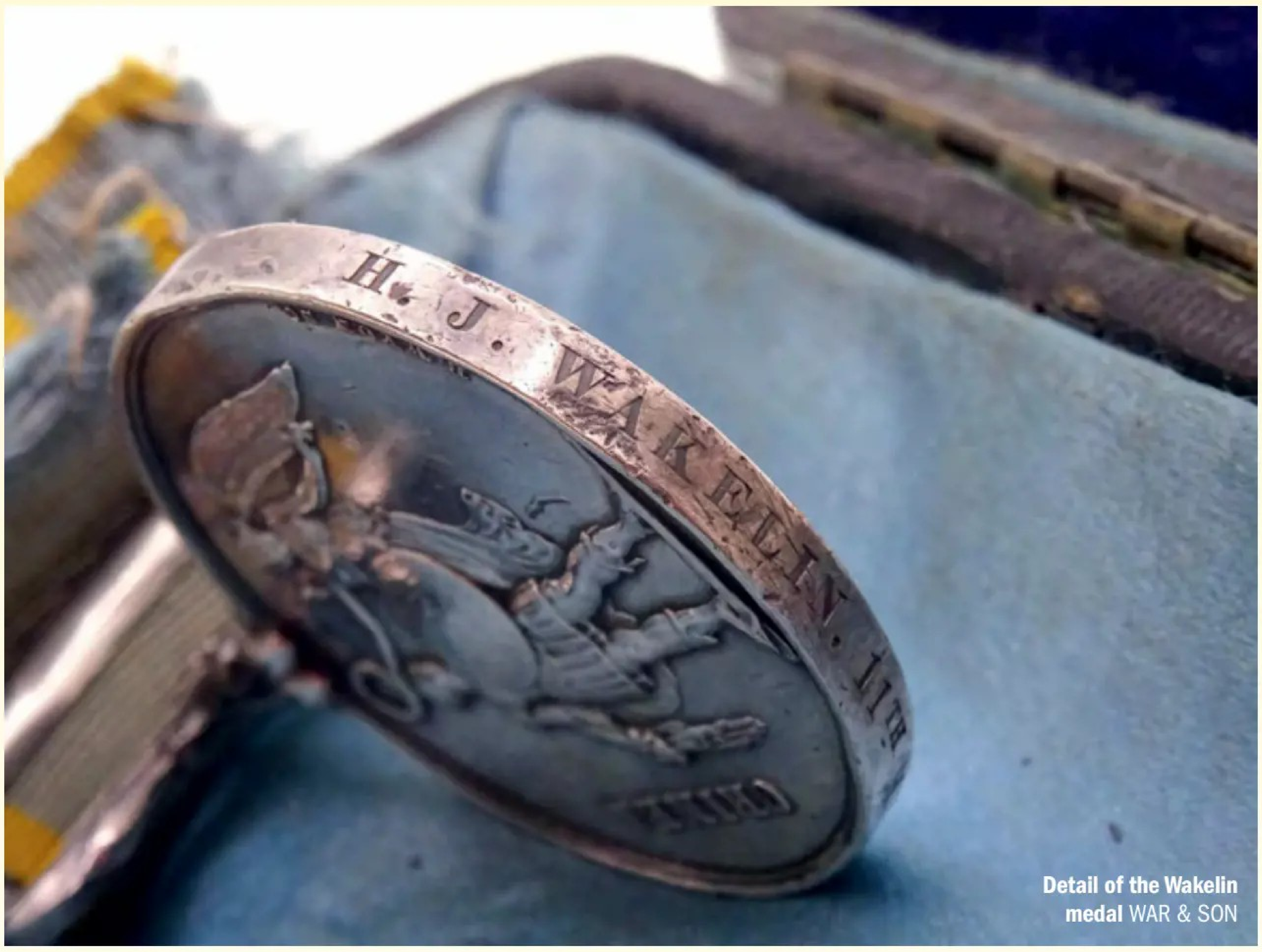
Between October 1853 and March 1856, a motley alliance of Britain, France, the fading Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Sardinia-Piedmont waged war to eject the Russians from Crimea. In addition to being something of a recognisably modern conflict featuring then-new technologies, thanks to the first use of photography on the battlefield, and of journalists reporting back to newspapers at home, Crimea captured the public's imagination. Collectables from the war have been in demand ever since, with medals particularly sought after.

The Crimea Medal was awarded to the British Army, Royal Navy and Marines. It is made from silver, measures 36mm in diameter, hangs from a pale blue ribbon with yellow edges and has the profile of Queen Victoria on the obverse. On the reverse is a Roman soldier carrying a circular shield (clipeus) and short sword (gladius), being crowned by a flying Victory figure. Curiously, the sword is broken and carried by the blade – traditionally, the depiction of a soldier gripping his sword by the blade denotes prowess and willingness to use it, but to carry a broken sword is commonly associated with defeat – but may also denote a determination to continue. In any case, such a figure crowned by Victory appears to be something of a contradiction.

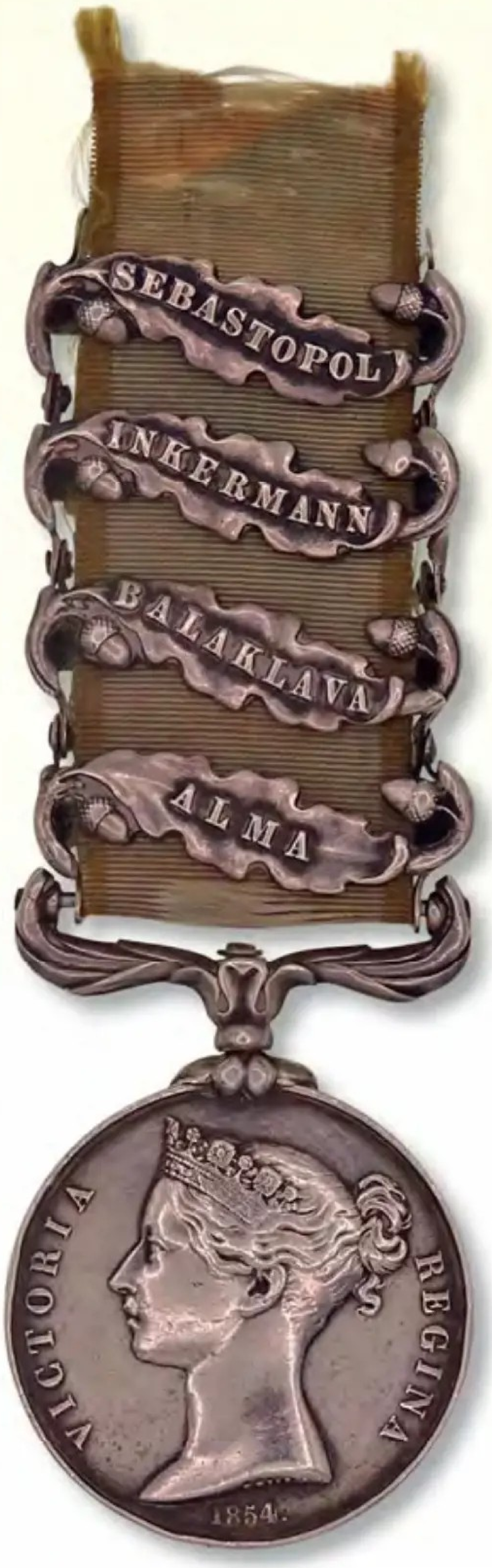
The interesting thing concerning the Crimea Medal is that there are five clasps (with a maximum of four on any one medal) – ornate additions shaped like oak leaves with acorn finials awarded for 'Alma', 'Balaklava', 'Inkerman', 'Sebastapol' and the Royal Navy exclusive 'Azoff' – you'll notice that modern spelling of some of these



The Crimean War medal with two clasps awarded to Henry Wakelin WAR & SON



Detail of the Wakelin medal WAR & SON



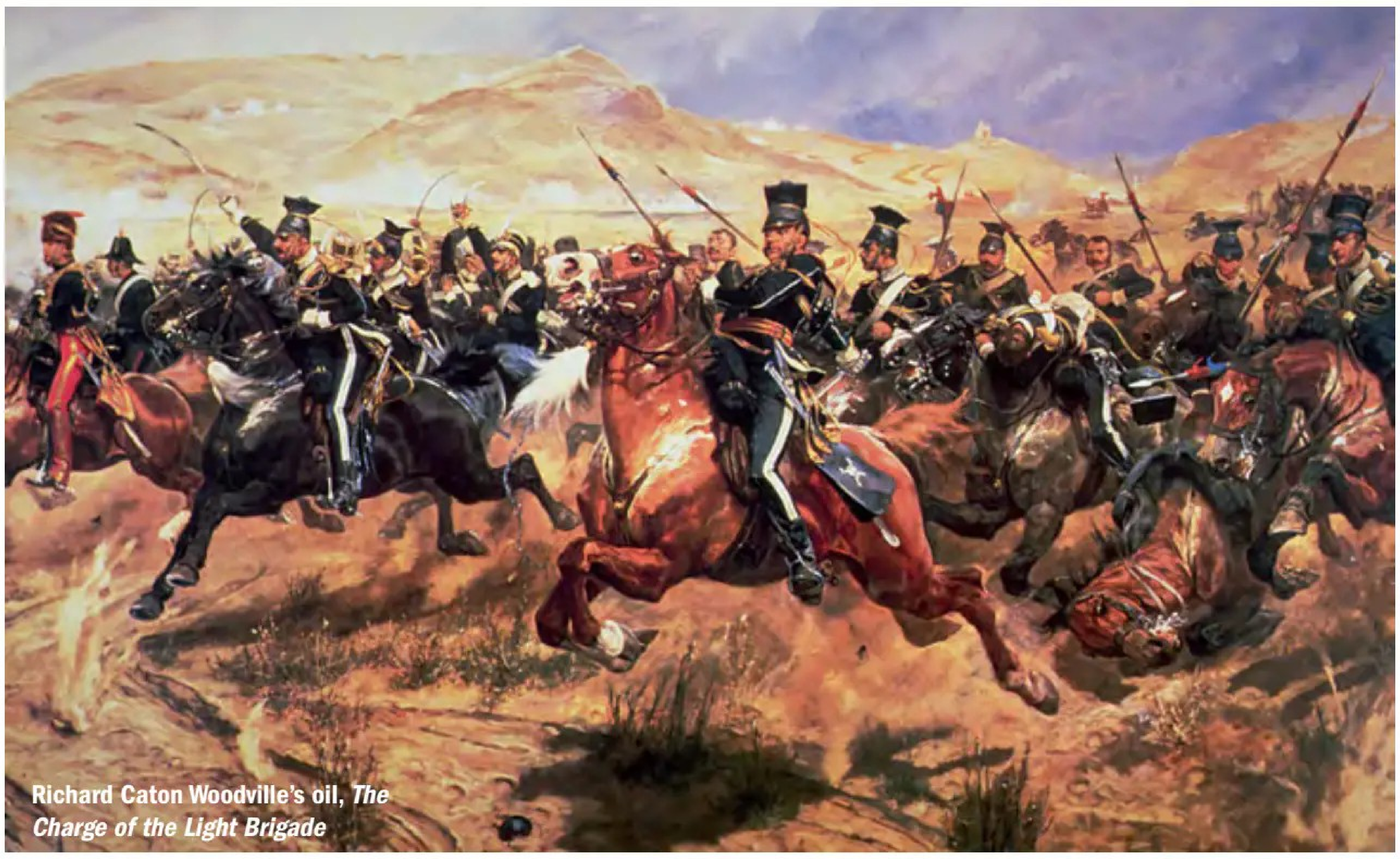
The medal and clasp combination awarded to Henry Hope, a soldier with a unique service accolade WAR & SON

locations differs. The medals were awarded unnamed, and many remain in that state, although some soldiers chose to privately engrave theirs, have them impressed by his regiment or officially impressed by the army. Values rise with each level of naming but note medals with 'Azoff' clasps are the rarest and generally the priciest, followed by 'Balaklava'. For these you're talking a few hundred pounds.

The more clasps a medal has, the more it's worth – but where things get spicy is if the medal is named and awarded to a combatant from a regiment involved in a famous action, such as the 93rd Foot (The Thin Red Line), or the Heavy Brigade and the Light Brigade at Balaclava, with the medal of a known combatant of the Charge of the Light Brigade action fetching up to £15,000 if officially impressed. If you see one at a boot fair, you've hit the jackpot!

> *"The more clasps a Crimea Medal has, the more its worth"*

So, starting at the top, War & Son (warandson.co.uk) has a Crimea Medal with 'Sebastapol' and 'Balaklava' clasps awarded to H J Wakelin who was killed in the Charge of the Light Brigade. Henry John Wakelin was born in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire in 1830 and in December 1851, aged 21, he abandoned farming for glory and signed up with the 11th Hussars. He was likely injured at Sevastapol as he is recorded as being in hospital between April-June 1854 but was discharged in time for the famous charge at Balaklava on October 25, where he was killed. There are a few scratches on the medal and the



Richard Caton Woodville's oil, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*

The reverse of Hope's medal, also showing his engraved name WAR & SON

Brunell's good condition Crimea medal LONDON MEDALS

The face of the Russian Imperial Crimean War Medal REGIMENTALS

ribbon has some small tears, but it's in good condition and is listed at £11,500.

Hope and glory

Wakelin's medal is impressive, but topping it is a Crimea Medal with clasps for all four land battles and awarded to the only man known to have ridden in the charge of the Heavy Brigade and then the Light Brigade an hour-and-a-half later.

Private Henry Hope's story is the stuff of legend. He suffered from epilepsy, was bullied by a sergeant-major, and Hope was confined to the guard tent awaiting court martial, when, on seeing the Heavies form up near the Light's camp, he escaped, commandeered a horse from the Scots Greys and rode into action. The last surviving member of the regiment, William Pennington described Hope as, "…an ignorant, passionate Welshman of great simplicity of character, very powerful physique, but subject to epileptic fits and with whom a kind word would have accomplished miracles." He also recalled Hope's heroics: "Returning unscathed, he made for his own regiment, riding with the 11th Hussars into the Valley of Death, and bearing himself like a knight-errant at the Russian guns."

Lord Cardigan personally forgave Private Hope his indiscretions due to his bravery, and he fought in all four major land battles and survived to make it home where, after brushes with prison, he died in his hometown of Carnarvon, aged 33. The asking price for this unique piece of history is a hefty £20,000.

If you seek something a little less pricey, London Medals (london-medals.co.uk) has an impressed Crimea Medal with 'Sebastopol' clasp that was awarded to Corporal G Brunell, 1st Battalion, Rifle Brigade. He was present during the Siege of Sevastopol, which lasted from September 1854 to September 1855. The medal is in good to very fine condition. Brunell enlisted on June 28, 1854, survived the conflict and bought his discharge on March 6, 1857, for the then hefty sum of £20. His medal will cost you £350.

The allied nations weren't the only ones issuing medals, the Russians had their own. Regimentals (regimentals.co.uk) has one with the dates '1853-1854-1855-1856' impressed on the obverse and Cyrillic script on the reverse, with a dirty blue ribbon. The medal is in very good condition and will set you back £195.

If you seek something a bit different, then how about a pickelhaube helmet relic? Waterloo Militaria (waterloomilitaria.com) has an Imperial Russian pickelhaube recovered from the battlefield and reputedly displayed at a museum in Balaclava. Although a relic, it's in decent condition as it still has the brass, flaming grenade spike and base, plus the helmet plate that depicts a Russian double-headed eagle, beneath a crown. There's also a shield bearing the regimental number of '48'. There's some evidence of this being a re-issue as the regimental shield has been applied over the top. The black leather shows shrinking and a couple of splits, which is hardly surprising. You can pick this up for £1,150.

Waterloo Militaria also has a few other interesting bits, especially for pocket money prices. You can get a Crimean War British artillery button – in nice condition for a battlefield relic – with maker's name for £20. How about four British and Russian musket balls picked up from Sevastapol? These little artefacts will set you back just £30. BW

SAGE ADVICE

"When it comes to medals, the thing to look for is how well the suspension grips the medal – you'll see some medals with a patchy repair job."

A Russian pickelhaube, British artillery button and spent ammunition are each lasting battlefield relics WATERLOO MILITARIA

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Captain Ram Bahadur Limbu VC, MVO

Captain Ram Bahadur Limbu VC, MVO
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HERO of the MONTH

by Lord Ashcroft

Gurkha Ram Bahadur Limbu with his L1A1 SLR rifle, circa 1965 KEYSTONE/GETTY

My admiration for the bravery of Gurkhas serving in the British Army over the past two centuries and longer has no limits. They have proved to be the very best soldiers: strong, disciplined, loyal and, above all, courageous. One man who exemplified all those qualities and more was Captain Ram Bahadur Limbu VC, MVO, one of just 26 recipients of the Victoria Cross in the gallantry medal's long and rich history who were either Gurkhas or British officers serving with Gurkha regiments.

Ram Bahadur Limbu was born on July 8, 1939, in the village of Chyangthapu, in eastern Nepal. He was the son of Tek bir Limbu, who had fought against the Japanese during World War Two, and his wife, Tunimaya. Life in Nepal, one of the world's poorest countries, was hard – so tough that Ram, as he was known, was one of only three children from eight siblings who survived to adulthood.

When Limbu was just eight, his father died – but not before telling his son of his wartime experiences. Such tales left a deep impression on the young boy, so much so that he resolved that one day, like his father, he would become a Gurkha soldier in the British Army. For a time as a boy, he was educated by one of his elder brothers. Later, he worked on the land as a farmer, but he was restless to do more with his life.

'Border area' skirmish

Aged 17, Limbu and two friends went to the nearest British recruiting station to join as a Gurkha soldier but without success. He then spent time in Darjeeling, India, working for a timber company. However, on November 1, 1957, and by this time 18, Limbu joined the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles having passed one of the toughest selection processes in the world. Limbu arrived at Sungei Patani in Malaya in early 1958 to begin his military service.

> *"On November 1, 1957, Limbu joined the 10th Princess Mary's Own Gurkha Rifles having passed one of the toughest selection processes in the world"*

In 1961, he married Tikamaya Limbu (the surname was quite common in Nepal) and the couple quickly had two sons, who would later both serve as Gurkhas. In 1963, Limbu was promoted to lance corporal, and he served in Singapore. However, the next year he was posted to Borneo. At the time there were various tensions in southeast Asia and hostilities between Malaysia and Indonesia had spilled into open conflict often known as the Konfrontasi by early 1963 – effectively an undeclared war with Britain supporting the former country.

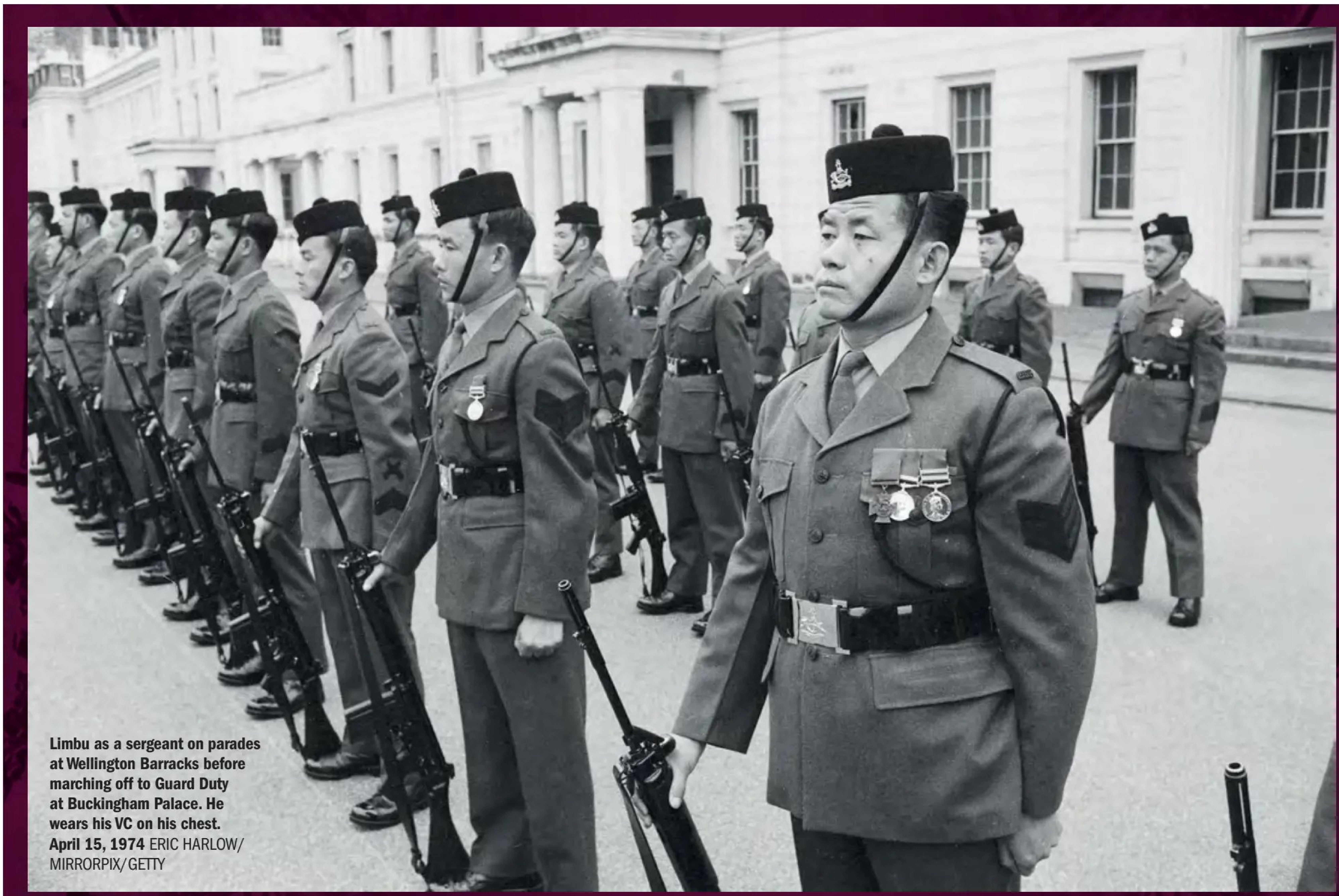
By 1964, Britain decided that the only way to deal with the incursions from Indonesia was to attack the positions on the Indonesian side of the border – although these acts of aggression were not publicly admitted. On November 21, 1965, Captain Kit Maunsell (Limbu's CO) led an attack on a well-defended Indonesian position on the 50ft-high hill at Gunung Tepoi. It was on this day that Limbu, then 26, showed such outstanding bravery that he was later decorated with the VC.

A lengthy citation went with the announcement of his gallantry award in *The London Gazette* on April 22, 1966, when, for the reasons already outlined, the area of fighting was described as the "border area". The citation described how the enemy, of platoon strength, had the advantage of being on top of a sheer-sided cliff and the only approach was along a narrow "knife edge ridge enabling only three men to move abreast".

The citation went on to detail Limbu's gallantry: "Leading his support group in the van of the attack he could see the nearest trench and in it a sentry manning a machine gun. Determined to gain first blood, he inched himself forward until, still ten yards from his enemy, he was seen and the sentry opened fire, immediately wounding a man to his right. Rushing forward he reached the enemy trench in seconds and killed the sentry, thereby gaining for the attacking force a first but firm foothold on the objective. The enemy were now fully alert and, from their positions in depth, brought down heavy automatic fire on the attacking force, concentrating this onto the area of the trench held alone by Lance Corporal Ram Bahadur Limbu.

"Appreciating that he could not carry out his task of supporting his platoon from this position, he courageously left the comparative safety of his trench and, with a complete disregard for the hail of fire being directed at him, he got together and led his fire group to a better fire position some yards ahead. He now attempted to indicate his intentions to his

Limbu poses with his son, Bhakta, following his investiture at Buckingham Palace KEYSTONE/ALAMY



Limbu as a sergeant on parades at Wellington Barracks before marching off to Guard Duty at Buckingham Palace. He wears his VC on his chest. April 15, 1974 ERIC HARLOW/ MIRRORPIX/GETTY

platoon commander by shouting and hand signals, but failing to do so in the deafening noise of exploding grenades and continuous automatic fire, he again moved out into the open and reported personally, despite the extreme dangers of being hit by the fire not only from the enemy but by his own comrades."

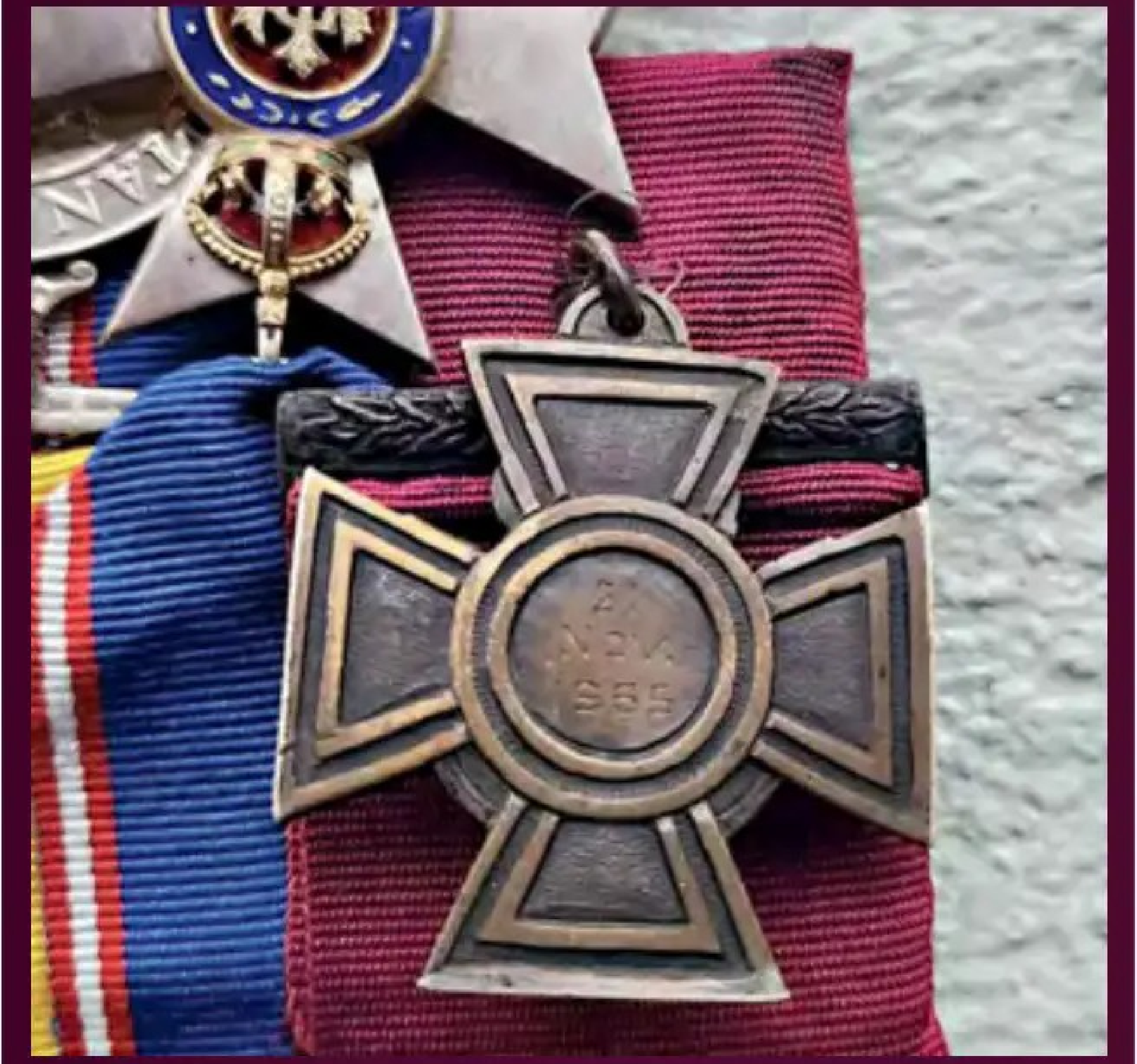
Speed his only cover

At this point, Limbu noticed two of his comrades had been seriously injured. His citation continued: "Knowing that their only hope of survival was immediate first aid and that evacuation from their very exposed position so close to the enemy was vital, he at once commenced the first of his three supremely gallant attempts to rescue his comrades.

"Using what little ground cover he could find, he crawled forward – in full view of at least two machine gun posts that concentrated their fire on him and which, at this stage of the battle, could not be effectively subdued. For three full minutes he continued to move forward but when almost able to touch the nearest casualty, he was driven back by the accurate and intense weight of fire covering his line of approach. After a pause, he again started to crawl forward, but he soon realised only speed would give him the cover which the ground could not.

"Rushing forward he hurled himself on the ground beside one of the wounded men and, calling for support from two light machine guns that had now come up to his right in support, he picked up the man and carried him to safety out of the line of fire. Without hesitation, he immediately returned to the top of the hill determined to complete his self-imposed task of saving those for whom he felt personally responsible."

> *"I didn't think I was going to be shot. All I cared about was rescuing my friends"*

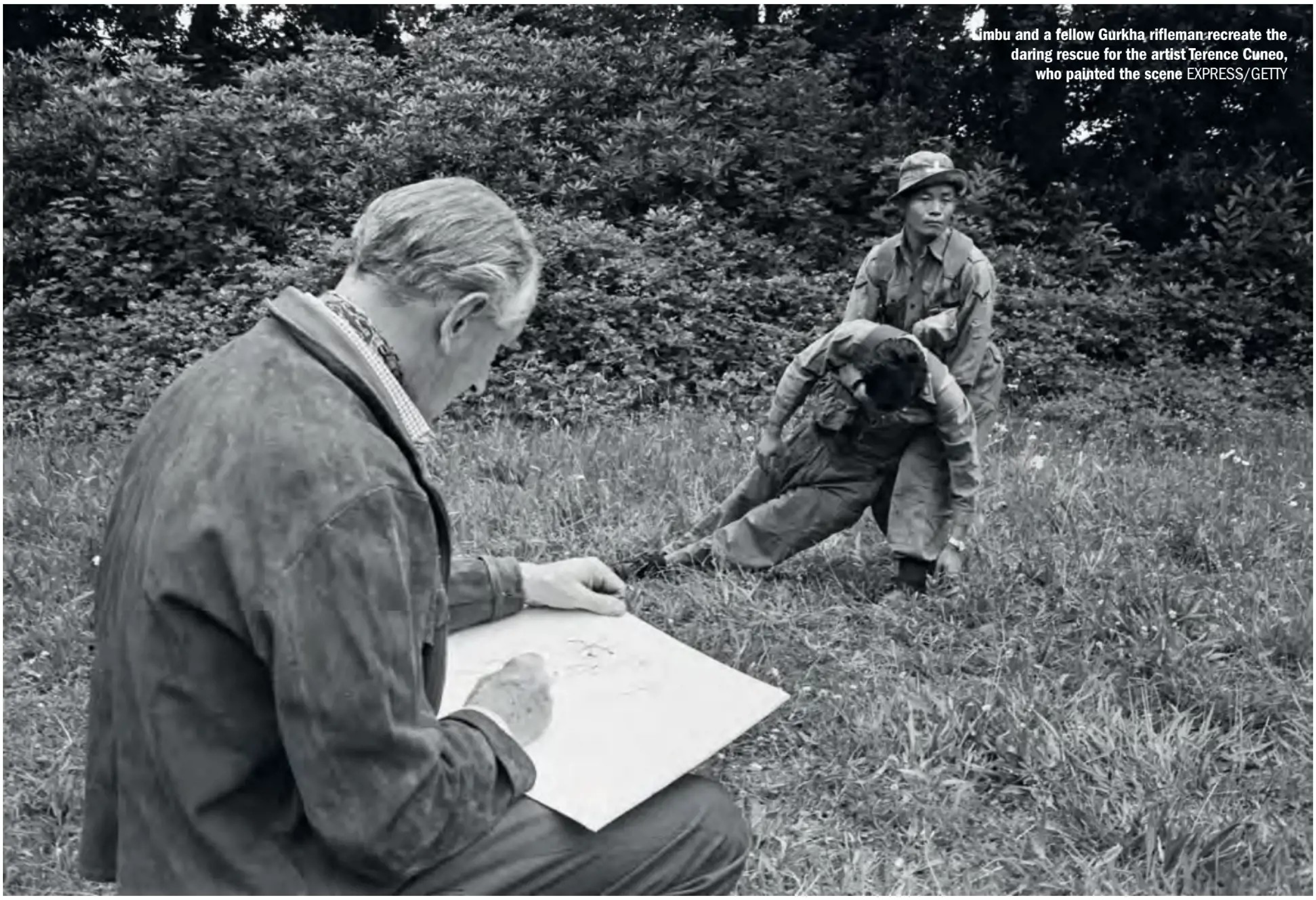


The reverse of Limbu's VC COURTESY OF VICTORIA CROSS ONLINE

With heavy enemy fire trying to prevent more rescue attempts, Limbu was pinned down for a few minutes by the intense automatic fire that could be seen striking the ground all round him. However, he eventually reached another wounded man, picked him up and carried him back as fast as he could through the hail of enemy bullets. For the best part of 20 minutes, Limbu had been moving alone in full view of the enemy and under continuous and sustained aimed fire.

The citation stated: "That he was able to achieve what he did against such overwhelming odds without being hit is miraculous. His outstanding personal bravery, selfless conduct, complete contempt of the enemy and determination to save the lives of the men of his fire group, set an incomparable example and inspired all who saw him."

Finally, rejoining his section, he was able to recover the light machine gun abandoned by the wounded and used it to support the attack and to kill four more enemy before the hour-long battle was won. At least 24 enemy were killed, with the attacking force suffering three killed and two wounded. The citation ended with these words of praise for Limbu: "He displayed heroism, self-sacrifice



Limbu and a fellow Gurkha rifleman recreate the daring rescue for the artist Terence Cuneo, who painted the scene EXPRESS/GETTY

and a devotion to duty and to his men of the very highest order. His actions on this day reached a zenith of determined, premeditated valour which must count amongst the most notable on record and is deserving of the greatest admiration and the highest praise."

"I didn't think I was going to be shot"

Limbu's joy at being awarded the VC was severely tempered by the death of his wife (who had fallen seriously ill) in February 1966, leaving him with two young sons to care for. Just five months after Tikamaya's death, Limbu was presented with his VC by Queen Elizabeth II in an investiture at Buckingham Palace on July 12, 1966.

The award of the VC was extremely rare in the post-war era, and so Limbu was widely feted as a hero. The party that came to Britain included Captain Maunsell and Limbu's elder son, Bhakta – then five. Ahead of the investiture, the party was allowed to stay at Edinburgh Castle. Limbu – polite, quiet, unassuming and proud – epitomised the archetypal Gurkha to his CO. However, his CO added somewhat ominously: "The Gurkha doesn't often get angry but when he does it's very dangerous."

Limbu's original VC was stolen, along with other valuables, while he was asleep during a train journey in India to his native Nepal in 1967. It was never recovered but he was issued with a replacement medal. That same year, Limbu married a second time, once again in his home village and this time to Punimaya Rai. The couple also went on to have two sons together.

Limbu continued to serve in the Gurkhas and was commissioned and promoted to lieutenant in February 1977 and, in December 1981, to captain. He was made a Member of the Royal Victorian Order in July 1983 after becoming the Queen's Gurkha Orderly Officer. Limbu retired from the military in June 1985. For several years, he served in the Sultan of Brunei's Gurkha Reserve Unit before returning to a life of farming in Chyangthapu in 1992. He also acted as a guide to tourists trekking through the Himalayas.

In 2014, Limbu travelled to London to speak during the Gurkha Welfare Inquiry into concerns over issues such as pension rights, equal treatment for Gurkha widows, free medical treatment for veterans in Nepal like that provided for pensioners in the UK. In the same year, he told a British journalist of his VC action: "I didn't think I was going to be shot. All I cared about was rescuing my friends."

In September 2022, the British ambassador to Nepal, Nicola Pollitt, travelled to Damak in Nepal – where Limbu was then living – for him to sign the book of condolence for Queen Elizabeth II after her death. "He signed the book, recalling with pride and sadness his long service for Her Majesty," she tweeted at the time.

Limbu died from heart and kidney failure in Mediciti Hospital, Lalitpur, Nepal, on April 22, 2023, aged 83. His body was flown to Damak where he is buried in the village cemetery. Honorary Captain Ram Bahadur Limbu VC, MVO was by then the last surviving Gurkha recipient of the VC. BW

VICTORIA CROSS HEROES, VOL.II

Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is a businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. His book, *Victoria Cross Heroes Volume II*, was first published in 2016. For details, visit victoriacrossheroes2.com. For more information on Lord Ashcroft's work, visit lordashcroft.com. Visit his website about courage: lordashcroftonbravery.com. Follow him on X and Facebook: @LordAshcroft

ROUGH RIDERS
RELUCTANT PARTNER

Military History with Pete and Gary

No.39

We all have heroes, and Gary has always been drawn to the forceful personality of Horace Smith-Dorrien, perhaps because of his past as a captain [he always corrects this to corporal!] of industry at Transport for London. He was born the 11th child of 16 to Colonel Robert Smith-Dorrien and his wife Mary on May 26, 1858.

Smith -Dorrien described himself as wild and mischievous, while a contemporary at the Harrow School, Sir John Fortescue, remembered him as "A very black little boy, black clothes, black hair and a very long chin!" His father was not convinced he would make a useful member of society and so in autumn 1875 asked if he would like to join the army. As his offspring was delighted, he attended an army crammer, passed the entrance examination, and joined the Royal Military College Sandhurst to pass out as a second lieutenant. He wanted to join the famous 95th Rifle Brigade, but in 1877 he was commissioned in the 95th (Derbyshire) Regiment of Foot.

On the eve of the Zulu War, Smith-Dorrien arrived in South Africa where he was employed as a transport officer working stores based at Rorke's Drift. Corruption was rife, and an early example of Dorrien's notorious temper occurred when he kicked a rogue out of his tent for attempting to bribe him!

On January 22, 1879, he was attached to a Royal Artillery detachment, and with six companies of the 1/24th Regiment, two small guns and native levies, was at Isandlwana. Lord Chelmsford, commander of the British force, had taken the rest of his force to attack the main Zulu army, but those left behind did not make any serious defensive preparations, even though by midday, it was understood that a large Zulu impi was approaching. Some Zulu carried rifles, but the majority were armed with assegais, a short spear with which they were very formidable. The British were armed with Martini-Henry breach-loading rifles, but as they were exposed and heavily outnumbered, the odds were in the balance.

The Zulus advanced slowly under the withering fire. But numbers began to tell as the horns of the impi swirled round the hapless British. By his own account, Smith-Dorrien rounded up stragglers to break open ammunition boxes and get them forward, but it was too late and the British were overwhelmed amid vicious fighting. As the final charge occurred, Smith-Dorrien mounted his pony and made his way behind Isandlwana where he found 4,000 Zulus who (remarkably) ignored him, probably because as he was wearing a blue patrol jacket, so the Zulu thought he was a civilian – and they were under strict orders not to harm civilians.

Smith-Dorrien headed towards Fugitives Drift on the Buffalo River, passing Lieutenants Coghill and Melville, both mounted, and Melville carrying the colours – later found with his body in the river. With 20 Zulu warriors close behind him, Dorrien managed to cross the 80-yard-wide river and its strong current by holding onto the tail of a loose horse. On reaching the far bank, he handed the horse to a man lying there. Smith-Dorrien was among the fewer than 50 British survivors from the battle – and one of only five officers to escape.

Smith-Dorrien's observations on the difficulty of opening ammunition boxes in moments of stress led to changes in army practices, although this no longer believed to be quite as important a factor in the defeat as thought at the time. It was a convenient excuse of disaster, but not the main cause. That was Chelmsford's overconfidence in splitting his forces.

Peter Hart and Gary Bain's long running 'Pete and Gary's Military History' weekly podcast is available via podcast services. Follow Pete and Gary on X, formerly known as Twitter: @HartMilitary

Next Month

July 2025, issue 219

Inside Your Magazine

On sale June 26

Our focus falls on Squadron Leader Alec 'Pathfinder' Cranswick DSO, DFC, who, at the time of his death in 1944, had amassed a total of operational sorties that probably eclipsed any other Bomber Command pilot. His reputation should rank highly among RAF legends such as Guy Gibson VC and Leonard Cheshire VC, and he is certainly deserving of a *BAW* tribute.

Rugby fans are excited by May's announcement of the British and Irish Lions team list, but did you know the Lions have a strong connection with military history? Several Lions made the ultimate sacrifice in both world wars, and we shine a light on those men who represented their country both on the pitch and in the field.

We also dive into the story of Canada's first VC. Alexander Dunn earned the award charging with the Light Brigade, but his untimely death – years later – is a point of controversy...

In the 1980s, British tankies facing the Soviet tide had a new tool in their armoury: Stillbrew. We chart the development of this add-on armour package and ask: how effective could this upgrade have been?

Plus

News, Lord Ashcroft's Hero of the Month, reviews and more

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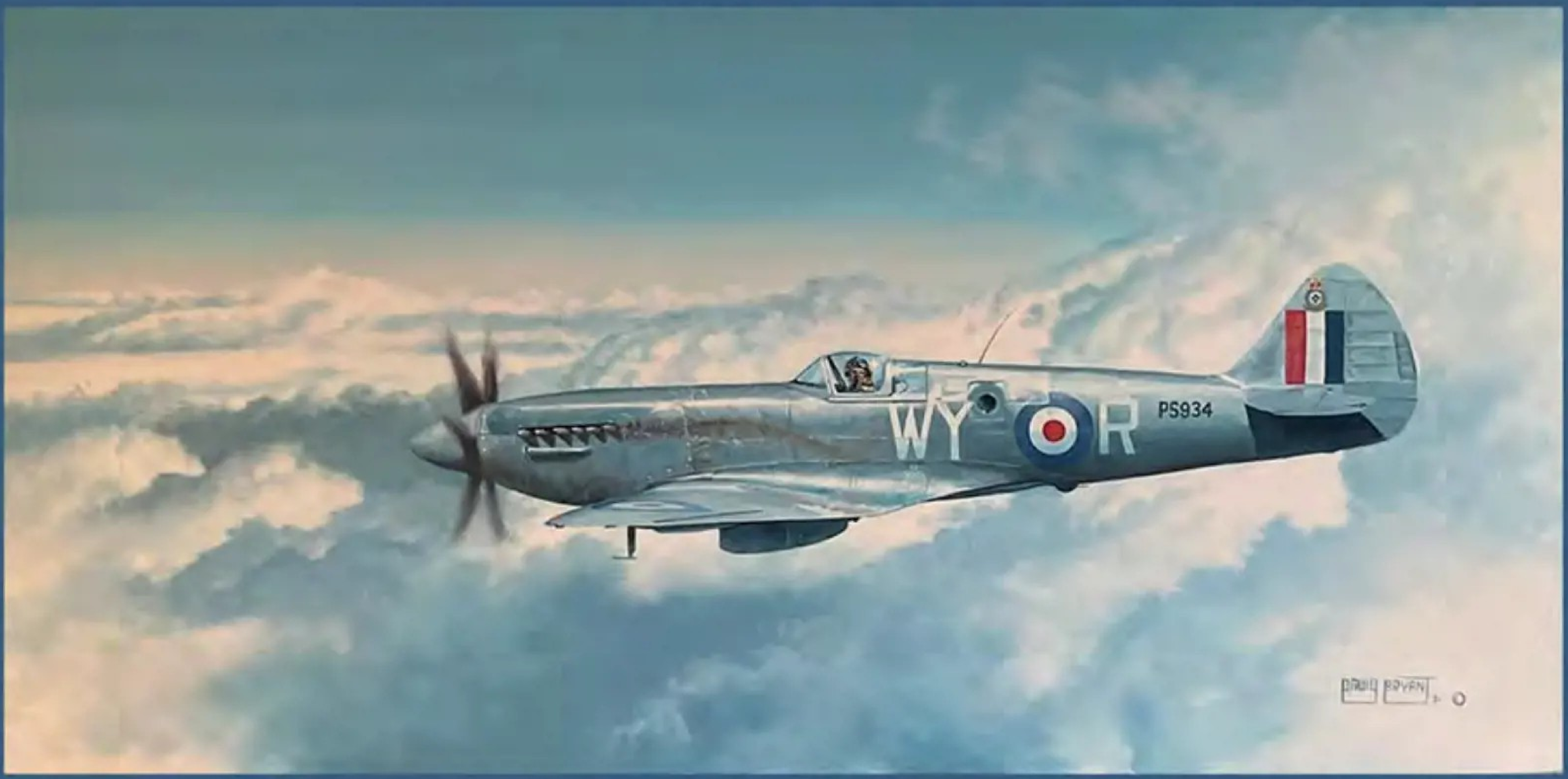
Can you help us?

We are seeking parts to build a partial fuselage of a PR Spitfire and also supporting artefacts for display in the museum.



If you have anything you think may be of interest to us please contact: manager@spitfiremuseum.org.uk

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